

# *The Colorado Quarterly*

THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

**Stories:** SYLVAN KARCHMER, H. E. FRANCIS

**Attic Salt**

HAZEL E. BARNES

**The Literature of the Angry Young Men**

CHARLES I. GLICKSBERG

**Reading Drama**

MORRIS FREEDMAN

**T. S. Eliot and the Sacred Wood**

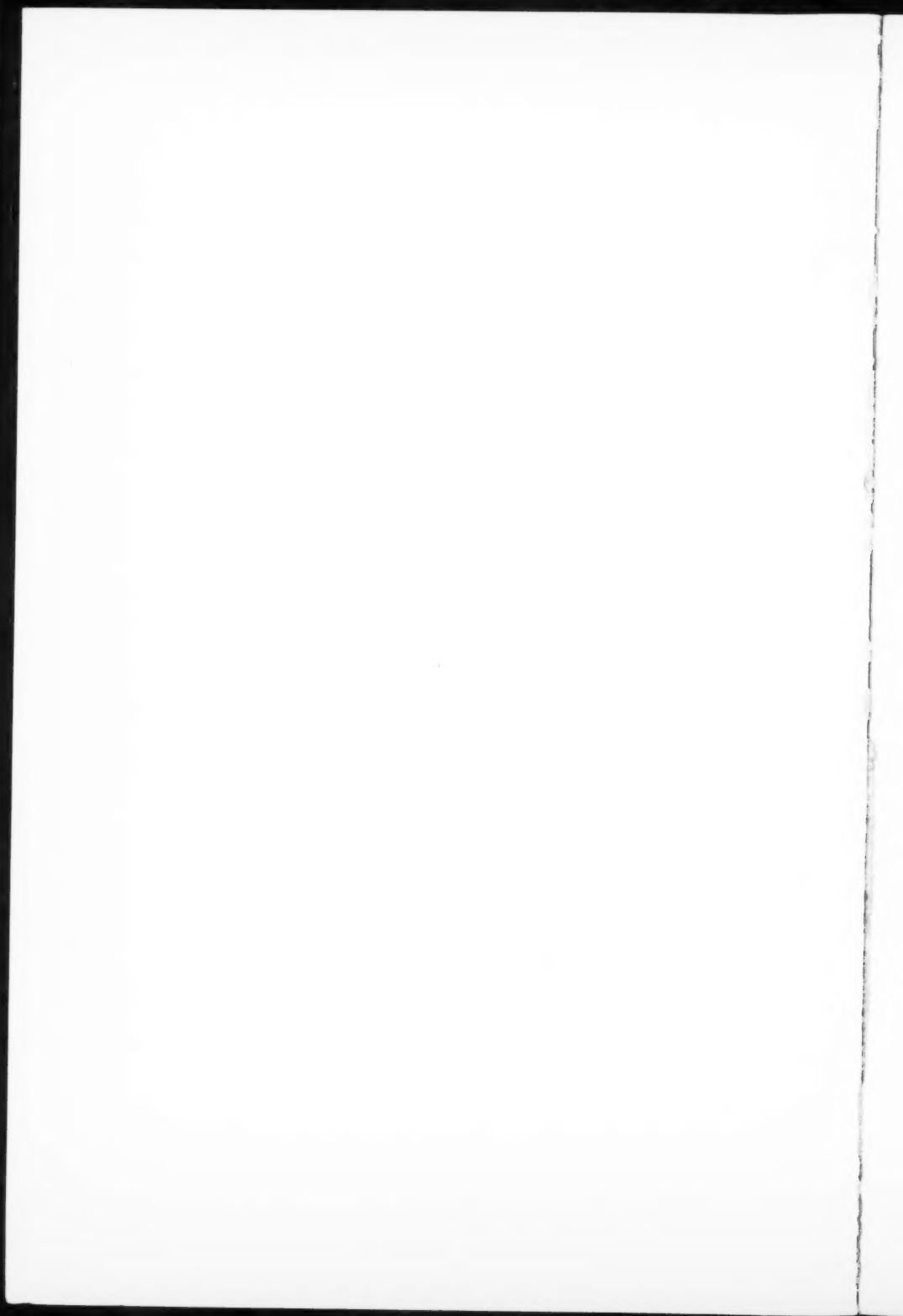
E. P. BOLLIER

**Poems:** JOHN WAIN, MALCOLM BRADBURY, CHARLES BLACK,  
EDMUND KEELEY, TANER BAYBARS, DOUGLAS NICHOLS, JEANNETTE  
MAINO, DAVID DEJONG, CHARLES PHILBRICK

\$3.00 a year

**SPRING, 1960**

75 cents a copy



# The Colorado Quarterly

Volume VIII, Number 4   ●   Spring, 1960

PUBLISHED BY

THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

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103 West, The University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

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Subscription rates: \$3.00 a year; \$5.00 for two years; single copies, 75 cents each. Foreign rate: \$3.50 a year.

Issued quarterly in Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring by the University of Colorado. Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Boulder, Colorado, July 1, 1952.

Unsolicited manuscripts, except those originating on the Boulder campus of the University, must be accompanied by self-addressed and stamped envelope. Articles and stories of moderate length (4,000-6,000 words) are preferred.



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Printed by the Johnson Publishing Company, 839 Pearl, Boulder

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## The literature of the angry young men

CHARLES I. GLICKSBERG

There is nothing creatively challenging or even spectacularly new in what the new generation of English writers, the so-called angry young men, have to say. If anything, they are less formidably articulate, less heated in their denunciations, than the lost and angry young men of the jazz age of disillusionment or those of the thirties when messianic Marxism was in the saddle. What the young English writers deeply resent is not only the indignity but absurdity of their position in a society that is rigged against their advancement and that has no genuine use for their particular contribution or talent. In retaliation for what they consider a fundamental act of injustice against them, they hold up to ridicule the fetishism of their social order, the rigidity of the class structure, the gross and grotesque incompetence of those who pre-empt the seats of power.

Hence their satire—unlike their literary predecessors of the thirties they produce no poetry worth mentioning—is designed not to revolutionize the English scene but to eliminate those abuses which keep young men of ability cooling their heels on the outside. The events of the past have soured them; inheriting the grievous burden of disillusionment that was thrust upon their fathers when the Spanish Republic fell, they have not been caught up on the tide of some generous utopian or radical cause. They are trapped in what Arthur Koestler aptly calls an "Age of Longing," their vision arrested by the memory of spiritual defeat, but they do not consider themselves fortunate in having been spared the experience, however costly, of espousing some militant evangel of social redemption. While they feel sorry for those men who have been incapacitated by the traumatic blows of the past, they cannot identify themselves with them in the extremity of their political uprootedness. Determined to be realistic in outlook, these young Englishmen will not sacrifice their place and function in the modern world. They wish to compel their elders to yield

ground and make room for the energetic and aspiring newcomers. The leadership of the old men of the tribe proved unsatisfactory, if not disastrous, and must be brought to an end. Hence one of the recurrent motifs sounded in the work of these young men is a rejection of the values of the preceding generation; they are resolved to discover a positive and viable philosophy of life and institute a new deal. For obvious reasons they are not too eager to experiment recklessly with the dynamics of social change; they hesitate to make any overall commitment. Why should they join some crusade and fight in behalf of some salvationary cause? The Shelleyan myth of the Golden Age, together with the related myths of progress and the perfectibility of man, has suffered a severe, if not crushing, blow.

Having served in the Army, many of them during the Second World War, the young writers in England today have learned to curb their life of feeling in order to protect themselves against the incursion of pain, not to expose themselves to the needless suffering of separation and loss. Those who were lucky enough to survive the war steeled themselves against the lures and the lies of politics. Socialism in England was no more than a noble illusion. The political changes that were wrought by left-wing agitation and effort benefited the members of the lower class, enabling them at last to acquire a type of education that had formerly been reserved for the rich, the élite, and to compete on a more equitable basis for places of privilege. Despite this gratifying advance, they are far from satisfied; the odds are against them; they are still kept down. They have managed to enter the professions and the civil service and even the world of politics, but the gain is only nominal. Their roots remain in their working-class background.

The ironic upshot of the revolutionary campaign of the recent past has been to breed a generation of counter-revolutionaries. The young men in England are in full revolt against the enervating doctrine of equalitarianism; they do not want to be kept permanently down. Talent and ambition and hard work should be accorded recognition; men of letters, for example, who are endowed with vision and a capacity for leadership should be given a hearing.

Nevertheless, what holds these young men back from forging

ahead and fulfilling themselves productively is largely their ingrained attitude of skepticism. Their detestation of all that is phony in modern life is essentially a negative virtue. When they hear the false and inflated rhetoric of politics or solemn appeals directed to the generous idealism of youth, they cannot restrain their cruel derision. Their prose work, for the most part fiction, seeks to rid itself of all forms of mannerism and stylistic pretentiousness. What they exploit with marked skill is the vein of comedy, the genre in which Kingsley Amis displays such fine aptitude. It is a type of satire that tends at times to run to extremes and to include deft and delightful touches of caricature. The heroes of this new literature refuse to become "engaged," in the Existentialist sense. Like the members of the beat generation in the United States, they make no attempt to conceal their ethic of repudiation, but unlike them they are eager to participate constructively in social life on their own honorable terms.

The character of the cultural ferment that makes itself felt in contemporary England is to be explained in part by the derivation of these young writers, angry or not, from the ranks of the working class. Though actively enrolled in the opposition, they are not hostile to the fruits of success, only they insist that success should be based solely on merit; they would establish an open market for talent and overthrow the rotting system of the status quo which perpetuates a tradition of mediocrity. What they are protesting against in the form of irrepressible and astringent satire is the cult of conformity, and they create protagonists who not only see what is going on but who are determined to denounce all that is fake in the society and culture of their time. Geoffrey Gorer, after reading *Lucky Jim*, *Look Back in Anger*, and *Room at the Top*, became convinced that what these gifted and embittered young men suffered from was "male hypergamy." When marriages take place outside of a class or caste, society has to decide how the partners are to be ranked. When the lower class male is raised to the higher status of his spouse, when, that is to say, he marries upward, the process is called "hypergamy." Stemming chiefly from working class origins, these young writers are fascinated by the theme of a young, energetic, and aspiring hero wedded to or having an affair with a middle- or upper-class woman. This is the

fantasy of social mobility, the struggle for success, that is embodied in one vital sector of contemporary English fiction. Such a theme offers ample opportunity for the development of internal conflicts since the social standards must be defied: the man must have the courage to aspire upward and the woman the daring to choose a mate beneath her station.

Richard Hoggart, in *The Uses of Literacy*, presents a sharply observed and illuminating sociological analysis of the character of the English working class today, their indifference to politics, their non-metaphysical outlook on life. His book offers a number of striking and instructive parallels with the values cherished by the angry young men who are engaged in writing. The working class see through the hollowness of propagandistic cant and patriotic appeals. "They do not think," Richard Hoggart declares, "such general calls for duty, for sacrifice, for individual effort, are relevant to them." Whatever "philosophy" of life they embrace is hedonistic, but their mild hedonism is informed with a deeply rooted conviction that they must not undertake long-term projects. That is why they have made up their minds not to worry. They know that the old sanctions have been taken away forever. Science now reigns supreme over religion. Human nature has its indwelling weaknesses and should therefore not be judged too harshly. This attitude is carried to a point where they are concerned about freedom from *all* restrictions, freedom as a good in itself. So that they finally reach a stage where they are unable to condemn anything at all or to be committed. Everything is relative, a matter of taste; there are no fixed and final values to abide by. Thus, paradoxically, the claims of conformity actually increase, for the easiest way out of a dilemma is to conform.

There can be no question but that the young writers of England have been influenced by their working-class background, but they find much in it that is repugnant. It is friendly and honest and warmhearted and gives its members a sense of belonging, but the young intellectuals want no part of it. They hope to enter a better, more gracious world. Not that their attitude toward life can be summed up in some neat formula. Some among them protest vigorously against the assumption that there are no causes worth fighting for. *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne, voices

the disenchantment of a younger generation that has been robbed of its heritage and plunged into a postwar world that is without meaning. Unlike Joe Lampton in *Room at the Top*, Jimmy Porter, the angry, explosive hero of *Look Back in Anger*, is not striving for success. Contemporary England, with its lack of ordinary human enthusiasm and its sanctimonious hypocrisy, bores him. The burden of his cry is that the world has treated him shabbily. Opposed to all the old traditions, the settled ways, the worship of money, the snobbery that opposed his marriage to a woman from a higher class because he was without wealth or social distinction, he condemns those who hark back nostalgically to the past. All his pent-up frustrations explode in the last act when he cries out:

I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. . . . There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus.

The trouble with Jimmy Porter is that he refuses to run away from "the pain of being alive." There is no longer room for people of his kind; since he does not know where he is going, since the future bears no promise and is harnessed to no high purpose, he is filled with a sense of disgust.

But disgust is not enough, just as disillusionment can degenerate into schizophrenic detachment. While the contributors to *Declaration*, edited by Tom Maschler, do not subscribe to a common platform of beliefs, they do seem to reflect a dominant attitude of non-commitment; they are unhappy about this but at the same time they distrust the utopian mentality. They stand for the most part aloof, ironic and amused spectators of the ignoble squabble called politics. Consequently their writing, since it scrupulously refrains from taking sides, remains morally ambiguous; it blows neither hot nor cold. A refreshing exception is Stuart Holroyd, author of *Emergence from Chaos*, who urges that the writer must take up arms against the dangerous dogma of materialism and restore the religious basis of life. Aligning him-



self with the religious Existentialists, Holroyd accepts their awareness of the dialectics of inwardness, their willingness to endure the conflict between darkness and light, despair and ecstasy, death and life.

Another contributor to *Declaration*, Colin Wilson, author of *The Outsider* and *Religion and the Rebel*, tries to draw a composite portrait of the modern "outsider," who is infirm of will, broken in spirit, his sense of purpose in life destroyed. He cannot resign himself to life as it is, even as he realizes that his life is not necessary; nevertheless, despite everything, he continues to struggle toward the goal of self-realization. Only through the religious synthesis can the rebel combat the plague of meaninglessness and recover a precious sense of purpose in life, but Wilson's proposal for this process of spiritual rehabilitations is not only vague but extremely confused. Granted that a new religion cannot be ushered in by a fiat of the will, how, according to his premises, can total skepticism culminate finally in a religious affirmation? The answer to that question is not given.

Colin Wilson and Stuart Holroyd point in different ways to the "religious" and spiritual ferment that is taking place in the minds and hearts of the younger generation of writers in England, but theirs is a minority report. There is little evidence of "religious" aspiration or ultimate concern in the novels produced by the members of this group. A distinguished and truly representative novel that dramatizes the desires and struggles of these young men is *Room at the Top* by John Braine. Here is the familiar American motif of success presented against the social background of contemporary England. The up-and-coming young men of talent are determined to succeed, to get ahead in life, but they labor under a severe handicap: they derive from working-class origins. The years of the depression left an ineradicable scar on their souls; their experience in the Second World War transformed their table of values. Now, free of all quixotic illusions, they know what they want; they are determined to reach the top in the furious scramble for wealth and power.

Yet *Room at the Top* is not to be confused with the American novel that deals with the theme of striving for success or with a play like *Death of a Salesman*. To begin with, such writers as



Kingsley Amis, John Braine, and John Wain are satirists. If they make the point that it is perfectly legitimate to strive for the good things of life—money, expensive cars, prestige—they are well aware of the price that must be paid for these commodities, the moral damage that is inflicted in the course of this sordid struggle. The bitterness of their social origins comes out in the form of moral indignation: those in power are willing to sacrifice everything that is decent and humane for the sake of retaining their power and increasing their wealth.

The blurb on the American edition of *Room at the Top* states the fundamental theme in the form of a question: Love or money? Which will triumph? As Joe Lampton leaves behind him the depressing poverty of his native town and sets out on his quest for success, there is no doubt as to the ultimate outcome. When Joe first arrived on the new scene of action, his face still bore the glow of innocence, untouched as yet by sex, by money, by the deliberate design of making the right social connections, by the need to influence people, “hardly touched by any of the muck one’s forced to wade through to get what one wants.” The protagonist knows all too well how society is managed and what one must go through in order to make his way.

Here is the young conquering hero, an aviator in the Second World War, who feels keenly the imposed burden of poverty, the stigma of belonging to a lower class in Dufton, his home town. In the new setting of Warley he discovers the symbol of what he would like to be, the kind of life he desires to enjoy, as if all his past life he had been fed on sawdust and thought it was pure bread. He is eager to enter upon a prosperous career, but he is held back by the rigid conventions of his plebeian past. Now he must put on the uniform and acquire the manners and polish of speech that go with a man on the rise. But this move to a better position is not made without an acute sense of discomfort, without a nostalgic longing for the streets of his childhood where there were friends who would never betray him. Yet the call of the future is not to be resisted. What he wants out of life is clear enough at the outset of the novel: “I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan—these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy.”

This is the new cultural compulsive that has crept into contemporary English fiction. This is the religion of wealth and power to which the young hero, like Gatsby but without his imaginative faith or poetic dreams, devotes himself. Like Gatsby, Joe Lampton believes in the orgiastic future and pursues it even though it eludes him.

Joe Lampton moves into action. He is keenly aware of the standards that govern society, how women, for example, can be graded according to their physical beauty and worth in the marital market. Invariably a correlation exists between the amount of money a man has and the good looks of his wife. At his job, too, he begins to perceive social distinctions that are based on how much money one can afford to spend on luxuries. He has made up his mind as to which of the two worlds he wishes to live in: "The world of worry about rent and taxes and groceries, of the smell of soda and blacklead and No Smoking and No Spitting and Please Have the Correct Change Ready and the world of the Rolls and the black-market clothes and the Coty perfume and the career ahead of one running on well-oiled grooves to a knighthood. . . ." He had willed all this to happen. He could have been a different person, real, sensitive, spiritually alive, if he had paid heed to his father's warning that some things can be bought too dear. He had overridden his conscience, and now he must live up to the conception of Joe Lampton entertained by the wealthy woman he has married. "Self-pity and class-consciousness were not included in that conception." That is what he had discovered at the expense of his own integrity and self-respect: yes, there is always room at the top.

Equally representative of this group of writers, and vastly more amusing, is *Lucky Jim*, by Kingsley Amis, an hilarious comedy of manners contemporary style. It is also a searching examination, with unsparing negative conclusions, of the contemporary social scene in England. Not without reason has it been held up to admiration as an example of the attitude characteristic of the younger generation; the attack it launches achieves penetration in depth by relying on the ingenious method of satiric humor. There is nothing angry about the tone of this novel, yet its forthright repudiation of the values of the upper class is for that reason

all the more effective. The hero, Lucky Jim, is, as Walter Allen noted in his perceptive review of the novel when it first appeared in England, a new type. On the surface he is worried about retaining his job in the history department of the university which has hired him, but inwardly he cannot adjust himself to the absurd ritual of conformity required of him. In every scene of crisis he invariably follows his honest impulses and thereby ruins his chances. He is too sensitive, too intelligent, innately too rebellious, not to protest in his own oblique but "subversive" way against all that is fake in academic life.

It is what he detests that makes up the structure and substance of the plot: he hates vanity, vaingloriousness, artiness, mediocrity, bootlicking. The heart of his objection to the academic life is that it is insufferably boring. He is not to be fooled. Everything in his life is driving him away from this wretched, dead-end career on campus. He is opposed to standing still; he welcomes the winds of change. He embodies a new ethic, an ethic based on the principle that one should go after what he wants and pay the price called for, a strategy more desirable by far than being forced to take, and like, what one really does not want.

It is fully evident now that these young writers are not actually angry; the title is a misnomer; they are disillusioned, and their disillusionment, as in the fiction of John Wain and Kingsley Amis, takes the form of mordant satire. *The Contenders*, by John Wain, is based on the theme suggested by the epigraph, taken from Anthony Trollope: "Success is the necessary misfortune of human life, but it is only to the very unfortunate that it comes early." *The Contenders* is a high-spirited and delightful demonstration—not without an undercurrent of profoundly serious comment—of the absurdity of the competitive mania that rules England. The author provides us with an amusing account of the criteria according to which social rank is judged. We behold what this frenzied struggle for success does to people, how it undermines their character and turns all human relationships into calculated moves of expediency; even marriage becomes a kind of investment, a business transaction. Yet the businessmen, the hollow men, are described in their passionate and exclusive concern for making money with unerring ironic realism.

The literary productions of these young men do not constitute a movement, in the strict sense of the term; they represent a sociological phenomenon, a mood, an attitude. Not that the writers betray any unanimity on political issues, but they are agreed that something drastic must be done to change the social order so that the young will not have to drift idly, their constructive energies going to waste. In some respects the authors resemble the beat generation in this country: in their cult of the outsider, their interest in Existentialism adapted to the needs of the English temperament, their search (on the part of a few) for a religious solution, but there is none of the rampant amorality and defiant nihilism of the beats. The literary young men of England are suspicious of cults and causes; they will not be fooled a second time; yet their idealism is implicit in their desire for participation in an organic society whereas the beat generation has gone beyond the limits of disillusionment, living recklessly in the present, without caring for the future, aligning themselves with the outcasts of society.

It is doubtful if the social resentment that animates these young Englishmen will give birth to any important literary work, but it may help to create the conditions for the emergence of such work. For these writers are observant, talented, very much in earnest, sure of what they want out of life and even more certain in their knowledge of what they do not want. Whatever happens, they are not going to allow themselves to be sold short. They want life served up to them in full measure, and they refuse to respect the arrangements codified in the past and perpetuated in the present which are based on distinctions of class or wealth. Far from revolutionary in temper, they simply support a program of social change which will enable the gifted and the hard-working to receive their just reward. How different is their mood from that which Auden describes in his poem, "Spain 1937":

Today the inevitable increase in the chances of death;  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of  
murder; Today the expending of powers  
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

No more sacrificial burdens or messianic dreams for the angry  
young men of today.

The literary movement (if such it can be called) led by the writers described above has deeper roots and is moving in directions far removed from the agitation for social change and the democratized opening of the market for talent. This can be seen in the work of such men as Stuart Holroyd and in particular that of Colin Wilson who, for all his vagueness and eclecticism, is fundamentally serious in his search for a religious meaning in life, for an existentialist synthesis that will recognize the dichotomies of the human situation and accept the tragic sense of life.

### AT THE DESK

By CHARLES BLACK

Skewed mathematics of brass—

Suddenly, the smell,

Unexplained, of goldenrod.

If there were a prism

To sort the blur in straight array

Of days and hours, the elemental pattern

Of this one scent . . .

A fence, a wagon, cousins . . .

A table (*Who brought these?*)

Coolness of a barn . . .

(Base metal, worked in the alembic

Of being gone, forgotten.)

## Two poems

JOHN WAIN

### TO A FRIEND IN TROUBLE

On those sharp edges of your broken love  
You cut your veins, which do not leak out blood,  
But suck in trouble, trouble, to your heart:  
What can I say? except that all about us  
I see a time of melting, a time of unloosing;  
And on my own life's flat horizon, also,  
The clouds swim up.  
So many faiths dry up or slide away,  
So many lovers I see with averted faces  
Who wander, and will not stay to be pacified.  
Now all our hearts, I think,  
Suck in this scalding drug through broken veins,  
This dry, ammoniac, destructive pain.  
I do not know what I should say to you:  
It is the madness of summer beats us down,  
The red-eyed sunshine and the pelting rain.  
I stand beside you empty of all comfort,  
Except to say that now your love is smashed  
And gashes at your veins, I feel your pain:  
And in these throbbing nights I also see  
Those broken edges in my doubtful dreams.

"WISE MEN, ALL QUESTIONING DONE"

Wise men, all questioning done,  
Close up their books and turn to face the sun,  
Either that sun of winter, thin and bright  
That swerves to earth and brings the early night  
Or the full lamp of June, its pounding race half run;

All speculation spent  
That rose between the mind and its content,  
The quiet brain looks inward at its store  
Of chosen objects crammed on shelf and floor,  
Knowing them not wisdom's self, but wisdom's instrument.

And there at last  
All tribulation stilled, all hazards past,  
It sees those intricate bright circles join  
That could not chink from hand to hand like coin  
But form within a mind that patience has made fast.

*Complete, complete,*  
The old men cry as the last circles meet,  
And the clear music of a living tongue  
Chimes from the particles it hid among:  
For finished work, like answered prayer, makes death taste sweet.

## Two poems

MALCOLM BRADBURY

### A WINTER JOURNEY

(After Rimbaud)

I know it is at best an evil flight  
To kiss goodbye your loved ones, break the bonds  
For nothing that is clearly seen as right.

It is a savage road we have to take  
Darkness on every side, and in the fronds  
The wild night beasts keep fear and hate awake.

The spiders in our carriage spin their thread  
No bird, you, sailing free, but a caught fly  
With little promised and so much to dread.

The world is shadows round us, and it bites  
Hard at the fingers of the bold who pry  
Too close and daring, or demand the rights

To peace and honesty and fair rewards  
From love and friendship, or an easy soul.  
Do we dare say the others are the bawds

Who tempted easy, and who easy fell,  
Seized in their hands the over-simple goal?  
Or must the blame fall on us two as well?

I think that we should take the evil flight  
And kiss goodbye the places we hold dear  
And see if there might not be some strange right

In daring all upon our soft-sensed bonds  
In one another; in this way ends fear  
Of harms which linger in the roadside fronds.



## A SONG ON TOADS AND GARDENS

Poems are a comment on experience  
And a comment on writing  
Like little girls who  
Running through the clear air, delighting  
In life suddenly find they are themselves,  
See womanhood, know the stain,  
Lose innocence in the world and  
Begin to seek for love, a place out of the rain  
Aware that what they are makes harsh demands  
On others, and that they had better seize  
The few rewards that accrue from  
Their forced assent to the human disease.  
And poets, too, are great sophisticates.  
Their innocence long gone, they play the word  
For far more than it's worth, and  
Push the profound almost to the absurd.  
So poems start in joy, and end in time.  
Being themselves unique, they simply say  
The age is new and strange, yet  
Every new day is just like yesterday.  
The history of poetry is found  
Within one single poem on the page.  
The history of little girls is  
In one, too, though that does not assuage  
Each one her hurts, the news she has to die,  
Open her bed to most unworthy men.  
The story of the poets is  
The tale of many who have asked again  
For special dispensation from the world  
For evidence of individual glory  
And if there is no new answer—still  
No-one would think that here ends the story.

## T. S. Eliot and the sacred wood

E. P. BOLLIER

Forty years ago, on November 4, 1920, a book was published in London, a thin octavo volume in blue cloth, its title stamped in gold—*The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* By T. S. Eliot. At the time few readers of this modest collection, and its readers were probably few, could have realized how important a role both its author and the book itself would play in contemporary Anglo-American letters. Today of course few living authors are better known than T. S. Eliot. For one thing, few are known for so many different roles. Except for writing prose fiction, Eliot has tried his hand at everything. Eliot the poet is known for *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*; Eliot the playwright for *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Cocktail Party*, and the more recent *The Elder Statesman*; Eliot the critic, not only for *The Sacred Wood*, but for a number of volumes of elegant and provocative essays. Eliot has also been a lecturer at various American and British universities. He has given talks over BBC. He has been an editor—his quarterly review *The Criterion* had an international reputation during the twenties and thirties—and he still is a publisher with Faber and Faber, London. He has even written on sociological, political, and religious matters. All in all, it is not difficult to understand why today at seventy-two Eliot is something of a literary institution.

Eliot, however, was not always an institution, nor have all his literary activities been of equal importance. No doubt, his poetry, or even his plays, will prove intrinsically more important than his prose. But even if it is exaggerated praise to say—and it has been said—that Eliot is the most important critic of our time in the English speaking world, there is no doubt that his criticism has been influential. Most university instructors of literature, most professional critics and book reviewers, both here and in England, have been influenced, if only indirectly, by his critical theories and practice. And if the future historian should conclude that

Eliot's critical influence is the most important thing about him, the historian must also conclude that *The Sacred Wood* is the most significant book he ever wrote. Not only was it his first book of criticism, but except for *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), a volume of three essays, it was the only collection of literary criticism Eliot made during the twenties, the decade which saw him rise from obscurity. Indeed, since almost half the actual literary criticism in his *Selected Essays* (1932) originally appeared in his first two collections—and after 1932 he published little literary criticism until *On Poetry and Poets* (1957)—it could be said that Eliot's critical reputation has rested largely upon *The Sacred Wood*.

It might also be said that Eliot's reputation as a critic and his reputation as a poet have been interdependent. Together his criticism and poetry, by precept and practice, have supported each other and demonstrated that vital relationship between the two he has advocated. In 1920, the year of *The Sacred Wood*, this interrelationship perhaps was not apparent. True, Eliot already had a small reputation as a poet—a very avant-garde poet to be sure—but his reputation as a critic was known to only a handful of literati. Unheralded, Eliot had arrived in England at the outbreak of war in 1914. In England he stayed, first as a teacher and then as a London bank clerk. Thanks largely to his compatriot Ezra Pound, however, Eliot had poems published in various American and British periodicals. By 1920 he had authored three volumes—*Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), and *Ara Vos Prec* (1920)—but the charge made against the *Prufrock* volume, that it was written by a “drunken helot,” hardly could have been reassuring, at least to the English public. Nor would the English public have been reassured by Eliot's critical reviews, had they read them, in the *Egoist*—a little magazine with Eliot its assistant editor—or in John Middleton Murry's *Athenaeum*. What the English public wanted of course was to be reassured, reassured that their tastes and their prejudices were right, and such popular critics as Edward Marsh, Edmund Gosse, and John Squires were satisfactorily reassuring.

At any rate, if Eliot the poet was not even an enigma to the admirers of these Edwardian arbiters of Georgian taste, the title

of *The Sacred Wood*, if they noted it at all, could have suggested only the abode of the nine muses. They would not have recognized that other sacred grove by Sir James Frazer sung, where under the golden bough a priest-king waited, sword drawn, to slay his usurpers or be slain. They would not have thought that the helot poet turned critic would supplant the old guardians of the sacred wood. For supplant them he did. But he also supplanted a critic more significant than they—Matthew Arnold, whose Victorian canons for over fifty years had continued to dominate English taste. In *The Sacred Wood* it was Arnold's "tradition"—his hierarchy of poetic reputations—that Eliot challenged. Of Arnold's English triumvirate—Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth—Eliot praised only Shakespeare. And Shakespeare's most famous play, *Hamlet*, Eliot declared a mistake. But writers Arnold had ignored—the poetic dramatists Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and Cyril Tourneur, or the metaphysical poets, like John Donne—Eliot declared to be in the "main current" of English tradition. These writers, he said, were superior to later English poets, particularly the Victorian Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne. More than a broker in literary reputations, however, Eliot was also a critic of criticism itself. And again what Eliot attacked was Arnold's views. Not only was poetry *not* a substitute for religion or philosophy or ethics or anything else, but the only function of criticism, Eliot insisted, was the elucidation of the work of art. Few realized it perhaps, but *The Sacred Wood* was in fact a revolution.

What factors determine a critic's success, his influence upon his contemporaries, is an open question. Influence in part depends on the readiness of those influenced to be influenced in a certain way. In 1920 *The Sacred Wood*, with its insistence upon literary standards, was welcomed by all who were long weary of the moralistic cast of much Anglo-American criticism of the time. And if Eliot's later change of heart in the thirties—when he admitted that moral standards could not be ignored in literary criticism after all—seemed apostasy to some and failed to convince others, one reason was that Eliot's early criticism continued to represent an ideal more congenial to modern taste. Without doubt, much of the persuasiveness of *The Sacred Wood* derived from Eliot's prob-

ably deliberate cultivation of modernity. In particular, he used the prestige of science to make criticism and poetry up-to-date in a scientific age. Like the scientist, Eliot implied, the literary critic was not interested in values, moral or otherwise, but in facts. Like the scientist, the critic also depended upon comparison and analysis of facts. His job was to observe, collect, and classify literary "facts." Then if his facts were facts, not fancy, they would demonstrate his point just as conclusively as a scientist's data or experiments prove his. For that matter, Eliot also filled his remarks with scientific analogies. The poet's mind, for instance, was like a chemical catalyst: it created a new work of art without itself being affected. The development of blank verse was like "the analysis of that astonishing industrial product coal-tar": from a basic verse form each poet developed a unique "product" of his own.

Nevertheless, Eliot's influence as a critic was probably due as much to his growing fame as a poet as to modernity. Certainly, it is as a poet-critic that Eliot must be approached. A poet-critic, Eliot has said, is always primarily concerned with poetry as an art or even a craft. He criticizes poetry, in a sense, in order to learn how to write poetry. He wants to know what has been done and how so that he may know what might be done next. The poets he prefers are those who seem most useful to him, usually those who are most like himself. It is no accident, for instance, that the Eliot who wrote the Dantesque *Ash Wednesday* (1930) praised Dante in 1929 as a poet from whom even English poets could learn a great deal. That is to say, a poet-critic by pointing out what he admires in the work of dead poets wishes to create a taste for the new poetry he admires, whether his own or that of other young poets.

Obviously, a poet-critic has his limitations, and the Eliot of *The Sacred Wood* had his. But Eliot made the preferences and preoccupations of a practicing poet seem the logical ones for the reader as well. He did so because he made the problems of the poet interesting by demonstrating how the poet solves them. He showed how even the best poets borrow from other poets, usually dead ones, but how good poets like Shakespeare make something new and generally something better from their borrowings, where

immature poets imitate and bad poets botch. He suggested how good poets like Marlowe and Spenser even borrow from themselves, improving upon early successes in later poems. Above all, he explained how good poets express emotion, not by talking about it, but by finding the right symbols for it.

Eliot's attempt to make the poet's point of view intelligible to critics and readers, however, was more than an incidental characteristic of his studies of particular writers. It is the key to his theories as well. Perhaps it is ironic that the Eliot who in *The Sacred Wood* accused Matthew Arnold of being a propagandist for critical ideas rather than a critic was himself engaged in the same kind of propaganda, but the propagation of his theories was probably the reason for his publishing the book in the first place. These theories are most neatly summed up in what he called his "impersonal theory of poetry"—first formulated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the most important essay in the volume.

In this essay Eliot suggested that the trouble with English poetry at the time—and he thought most of it bad—was partly a trouble with criticism. Neither the poet nor the critic—or the common reader—understood what poetry was. Critics and readers praised poets for the wrong things. They praised a poet for being different from other poets, and what made him different they thought was his personality. The poet, in turn, understandably desiring praise, was likely to cultivate his differences, become a "personality," someone to be lionized at literary teas, an item for literary gossip. And even if a poet resisted the role of "poet" and tried to write poetry, he was likely to go astray because the popular demand for novelty was an implicit denial of the past, particularly the literature of the past. And it was only by knowing as much as possible about the work of his predecessors that a poet could discover what poetry was.

What the poet needed to know in order to write, the critic of course needed in order to criticize, the reader in order to appreciate. All three needed to have a sense of "tradition," to have a "conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written." To have a sense of tradition also involved "the historical sense," which meant a "sense of the timeless as well

as of the temporal and of the timeless and temporal together." That is to say, everyone needed to be aware that "art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same." A poet must reflect the age in which he lives, and each age is different, but the differences are not absolute. The mind of man changes each generation, but "this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawings of the Magdalenian draughtsmen." The mind develops, but from the point of view of the artist it does not improve. Modern man may know more than man did before him, but he does so because what he knows is the accumulation of what man throughout history has learned. And since the materials of art change but do not improve, art cannot improve, because art is nothing more than the most adequate statement of what the mind of man as reflected in the artist's mind happens to think and feel at any particular time. There are different ways of stating what that mind thinks and feels, some better than others, but between two equally adequate statements no judgment of better or worse is possible.

Literary judgment, in short, is based on *how* something is said, not on *what* is said, and all judgment is therefore relative. No literary work can be understood or judged alone. It must be compared with other works—in a sense, with all other works, for whether anyone can ever be familiar with all of literature, he must realize that all the works ever written form an "ideal order," with each work having its place depending on its relation to all other works. When a really "new" work is written, the relative place—or significance or value—of every other work is modified. A new work always brings about a "judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other." And a poem which is not "new" in the sense that by fitting into the existing order of poetry it also modifies that order is neither new nor a work of art. It is an imitation, and Eliot has always insisted that to do again what has already been done as well as it can be done is a waste of time. A poet, however, must know a great deal about other poetry to know what is not a waste of time. Yet, since the knowledge required is so vast, he may never know enough—unless the critic



comes to his aid to advise and instruct him. And to do this, the critic himself must know as much as possible about literature.

On the other hand, what the critic might teach the poet is less simply stated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The poet must be aware that poetry is a record, so to speak, of what the human mind has thought and felt. But it is not a personal record; it is not what this or that poet thinks he has thought and felt. Even though the poet may write about his personal experiences, the experiences of others he has observed may serve his purpose as well—just as such experiences serve the novelist or dramatist—and in either event, the experiences are only his raw material. The poet *as* poet is separate from the man he happens to be: the mind of the poet simply observes whatever the man experiences with the detachment of a scientist—or a critic. These experiences are less external events than internal emotions and feelings. Furthermore, these emotions and feelings mix and combine themselves with others which have nothing to do with whatever immediate experience may be the stimulus for a poem. Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," Eliot remarked, "contains a number of feelings which have nothing to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together."

In a manner of speaking, then, the poem writes itself: the poet's mind does not *consciously* make these associations. What the poet does consciously is try to discover what his emotions are by discovering what words best fit them. Or as Eliot explained elsewhere in *The Sacred Wood*, in the essay on *Hamlet*, the poet seeks to express his emotions "by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." The poet "creates" by discovering symbols for his emotions, and poetry, consequently, is a symbolic statement of emotion, not the emotion itself. Hence, what the poet makes, the poem, is neither what the poet thought he felt initially nor what the reader thinks he feels on reading it, but a complex symbol of many feelings, emotions, and impressions fused into a new whole independent of both poet and reader—a



new art object which, like a painting or a piece of music, may mean or say different things to different people. In short, Eliot insisted that poetry was not self-expression, not the expression of emotion or personality, but an "escape" from emotion and personality. It is an escape because the poet dissociates himself from his emotion or personality, makes it an *object* which may be *looked at* like any other object. The poet dramatizes his feelings; he acts them out.

This notion has been called a theory of catharsis for the poet: writing poetry is therapeutic. No doubt, it is. What Eliot stressed, however, was that poetry is the transformation of personality into something objective, into a "world," as he said of Ben Jonson's plays—a world which is at the same time a point of view. It is a point of view, because it is the world as the poet has seen and felt it. It is, one might say, the poet's attitude towards the world objectified into vision. It is not what he thinks about the world, but what he has felt. The poet is not a philosopher, Eliot has said time and again. Ideas are not the poet's business. The poet may use ideas in his poetry, but he is not interested in their "truth"—he is interested rather in the "truth" of his feelings about ideas. In any event, the only significant emotion or personality is that which has its "life in the poem itself and not in the history of the poet," Eliot concluded. "The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done." To write a poem is a job like any other job, like making a table or throwing a jug on the wheel—and whatever emotion a potter may feel in making a jug, the only emotion the jug contains, so to speak, is what an onlooker feels when he sees it. So it is with poetry, Eliot maintained, and whoever understands this will understand what he meant when he said: "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."

The other essays in *The Sacred Wood* might be called illustrations of this "impersonal" theory of poetry and criticism. To say this is not to dismiss these essays as having no other importance. What Eliot said about Blake or Dante was, and still is, stimulating, and his remarks have helped many readers to see particular authors in a new light—Donne's star became ascendent partly because of

Eliot's praise, although Ben Jonson's remains in academic obscurity despite the essay Eliot devoted to him. Still, the significance of *The Sacred Wood* as a book lies less in these particular judgments than in what Eliot had to say in general about the nature of poetry and criticism. His description of poetry, not as emotional expression, but as symbolic statement—emotion dramatized into symbolic action—and his insistence that modern poets use modern language have affected the work of many contemporary poets, particularly since his own verse offers such an impressive example of his theories. His speculations about the possibilities of poetic drama, amplified in later books and again demonstrated by his own practice in verse drama, have done much to encourage the attempt to restore verse to the contemporary stage. His advice to poets to know as much as possible about poetry, as well as about other things, has helped, not only to restore a respect for verse techniques, but to bring back to contemporary poetry an intellectual strength conspicuously lacking in the work of most of his immediate predecessors, both American and British.

What Eliot had to say about criticism itself, however, perhaps remains more important than what he said about poetry. His central idea, the interrelationship among poet and critic and reader, is not the only valid conception of the function of criticism, but it is one which needs to be remembered. The function of criticism is to instruct, to instruct by mediating, on the one hand, between the young poet and the tradition and, on the other, between the poet and the reader. To help the poet know what he should do and how, and to help the reader understand what the poet attempts and how well he succeeds, and to do both these things by presenting the literary work as a fact in relation to other facts so that when the evidence, so to speak, is presented it is self-evident—this is the function of the critic. Only the ideal critic of course could do this infallibly, but it is an ideal critics might strive for. And if they do so impersonally, as scientists approach their facts, the same sort of "science," of co-operative correction and double-checking, might be possible. Even if no single critic can ever know enough, as Eliot suggested in "The Function of Criticism" (1923), together critics might know enough to relieve the poet of the necessity of being wholly his own critic and thus free him to write more

poetry more intelligently. And such co-operative knowledge would also free the reader from the limitations of his own taste, his own prejudices, or his own uncertainties.

Certainly, it can be said—although criticism is still not a “science,” and perhaps never will be—that *The Sacred Wood* has been instrumental in stimulating on both sides of the Atlantic literary criticism which is literary criticism, not just appreciation or uncritical enthusiasm, or history or biography passing itself off as criticism. Eliot’s contention that the critic’s job is to examine the text before him has helped create what has been called the “new criticism,” a criticism primarily interested in literature as literature. Perhaps Eliot himself after his conversion in 1928 to Anglo-Catholicism at times has forgotten his own principles. Perhaps some of the “new” critics in America, men like John Crowe Ransom or Allen Tate, have also from time to time forgotten them. Still, the principle that close explication of literary texts is the only valid *literary* criticism has derived much of its strength from Eliot’s own practice. Many readers who have never opened *The Sacred Wood*, and never will, but who have found that literary criticism can be *useful*—not as a substitute for literature or for thinking, but as a guide to understanding—may well be thankful that forty years ago T. S. Eliot discovered that what was sacred in the sacred wood was literature itself.



## Three Greek poets

GEORGE SEFERIS

### THE LAST STOP

Translated by Edmund Keeley  
(Cava dei Tirreni, 5 October '44)

Few the moonlit nights that have pleased me:  
the alphabet of the stars—which you spell out  
as well as your fatigue at the day's end allows  
and from which you discern other meanings and other hopes—  
then can be read more clearly.

Now that I sit idly and reflect,  
few are the moons that remained in memory:  
islands, color of grieving Madonna, late in waning  
or moonlight in northern cities casting sometimes  
over turbulent streets, rivers, and limbs of men  
a heavy torpor.

Yet here last evening, in this our final port  
where we wait for the hour of our return to dawn  
like an old debt, money which lay for years  
in a miser's safe and at last  
the time for payment came  
and coins were heard falling on the table—  
in this Etruscan village, behind the sea of Salerno  
behind the harbors of our return, on the edge  
of an autumn squall, the moon  
outstripped the clouds, and houses  
on the slope opposite became enamel:  
*Amica silentia Lunae.*<sup>1</sup>

This is a train of thought, a way  
to begin to speak of things you confess

uneasily, at times when you can't hold back, to a friend  
who fled in secret and who brings  
news from home and from the companions,  
and you hasten to open your heart  
before this exile forestalls you and alters him.  
We come from Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria;  
the little state  
of Kommagene, which flickered out like a small lamp,  
often comes to mind,  
and great cities which lived for thousands of years  
and then became pastures for cattle,  
fields for sugar-cane and corn.  
We come from the sand of the desert, from the seas of Proteus,  
souls shrivelled by public sins,  
each holding public office, like a bird in its cage.  
The rainy autumn in this cavity  
infects the wound of each of us  
or what you might term differently: nemesis, fate,  
or simply bad habits, fraud and deceit,  
or even the selfish urge to reap reward from the blood of others.  
Man frays easily in wars;  
man is soft, a sheaf of grass,  
lips and fingers that hunger for a white breast  
eyes that half-close in the radiance of day  
and feet that would run, no matter how tired,  
at the slightest call of profit.  
Man is soft and thirsty like grass,  
insatiable like grass, his nerves roots that stretch out;  
when the harvest comes  
he would rather have the scythes whistle in some other field;  
when the harvest comes  
some call out to exorcise the demon  
some become entangled in their riches, others make orations.  
But what good are exorcisms, riches, orations  
when the living are far away?  
Is man any different?  
Is it not this which confers life:  
a time for planting, a time for harvesting?

The same things over and over again, you will say, my friend.  
But the thought of the refugee, the thought of the prisoner, the  
thought  
of man when he too has become a commodity—  
try though you may, you cannot change it.  
He might even have wished to remain king of the cannibals  
expending powers which no one buys,  
to promenade in fields of agapanthi  
to hear the drums beneath a bamboo tree,  
as courtiers dance with prodigious masks.  
But the country which they chop up and burn like a pine-tree, and  
which you see  
either in the dark railroad car, without water, the windows broken,  
night after night  
or in the burning ship which, as the statistics indicate, will  
surely sink,  
these things have taken root in the mind and do not change  
these things have planted images like those trees  
which in virgin forests cast their branches  
and these take root in the earth and sprout again;  
they cast their branches which sprout again, striding league after  
league—  
and our mind a virgin forest of slain friends.  
And if I speak to you in fables and parables  
it is because you hear it more gently, and horror  
cannot be talked about because it is alive  
because it is speechless and continues:  
the pain that wounds memory  
drips by day, drips in sleep.<sup>2</sup>

To speak of heroes to speak of heroes: Michael  
who fled from the hospital with open wounds  
perhaps he spoke of heroes—the night  
he dragged his foot through the darkened city—  
when, groping, he howled out our pain: "We advance in the dark,  
we go forward in the dark . . ."  
The heroes go forward in the dark.

Few the moonlit nights that have pleased me.

NIKOS GATSOS

DEATH AND THE KNIGHT (1513)<sup>3</sup>

Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard

As I behold you motionless  
journeying through the ages with the steed of Akritas  
and the lance of Saint George,<sup>4</sup>  
I could place near you,  
with these dark forms that will assist you always,  
until one day you too will vanish with them forever,  
until you become a fire again in the great womb of Fate that gave  
you birth,  
I could place near you  
a bitter orange-tree in the snow-covered meadows of the moon,  
could unfold before you the veil of some evening,  
with the red star of Scorpio singing of youth  
with the River of Heaven spilling into August  
with the North Star weeping and freezing,  
I could place pastures,  
streams that once watered the lilies of Germany,  
and this armour that you wear, I could adorn it  
with a basil-shoot and a spray of mint  
with the weapons of Plapoutas and Nikitaras' trophies.<sup>5</sup>  
But I who saw your descendants like birds  
tear the sky of my country one spring dawn,  
saw the cypresses of Morea hush  
there on the plain of Nauplia,  
before the ready embrace of the wounded sea,  
where the centuries have fought with the crosses of courage,  
I will now place near you  
the embittered eyes of a child,  
the closed eyelids  
in the mud and blood of Holland.

This black land  
will grow green some day.  
The iron hand of Goetz will overturn the carts,<sup>6</sup>  
will load them with sheaves of barley and rye,

and in the dark forests with their dead loves,  
there where time turned a virgin leaf to stone,  
on breasts where a tearful rose trembled lightly,  
a silent star will shine like a spring daisy.

But you will stay motionless;  
with the stead of Akritas and the lance of Saint George  
you will journey through the ages,  
a restless hunter of the generation of heroes,  
with those dark forms that will assist you always,  
until one day you too will vanish with them forever,  
until you become a fire again in the great womb of Fate that gave  
you birth,  
until again in the river caves resound  
heavy hammers of patience  
not for rings and swords<sup>7</sup>  
but for pruning-knives and ploughs.

#### D. I. ANTONIOU

##### TONIGHT YOU REMEMBERED

Translated by Edmund Keeley

Tonight you remembered the beginning  
the night of rain when you decided  
to make experience the nostalgia for distant places  
that left us without value  
for life.

We asked you to pity us Lord,  
seed of a gaudy flowering  
in the barren earth.  
Crushed to the point of silent prayer  
ruined to the point of desperation,  
we longed for the fate of simple men,  
the astonishment of the ignorant.



Empty us of all we know  
give us—we cried within ourselves—  
fatigue  
after an honest struggle.

Condescension!  
the decision: to take the road we took  
until the end; from where we fell  
to rise again.  
Do not give us practical dreams,  
do not awaken the magnets of inheritance:  
prows that lose themselves and find themselves out to sea.  
In our anonymous attempts deliver us;  
from where we fell to rise  
winning the victory  
body to body.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Virgil, *Aeneid*, ii, 255.

<sup>2</sup>See Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 179-180.

<sup>3</sup>The title and some of the imagery of this poem were suggested by Durer's famous copperplate engraving, "The Knight, Death, and the Devil" (1513).

<sup>4</sup>Acritas is the warrior hero of the Byzantine epic, *Degenis Acritas*.

<sup>5</sup>Plapoutas and Nikitaras, heroes of the Greek War of Independence, were renowned for feats of great individual courage.

<sup>6</sup>Goetz von Berlichingen (1480-1562) was a German knight whose right arm was shot away in 1505 while he was assisting Albert IV, duke of Bavaria, at the siege of Landshut; he substituted an iron arm and became known as "Goetz with the iron hand." Goethe made him the hero of his play, "Goetz von Berlichingen" (1771).

<sup>7</sup>The allusion is to Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen."

## Two poems

TANER BAYBARS

### THE SECOND TENANT

She woke me up before or just after midnight  
and then sleep would not inhabit the eyes.  
Again and again she flowed down the stairs  
carrying armfuls of voices with her  
and I counted her steps in my room wide awake.

Then above me I heard her chair move  
and her silk gown fall off the bed.  
My eyes had opened, sleep had fled;  
up there while she lay with curled lips  
I explored the hidden corners of my pillow.

Hours passed; above me I felt her dark room  
while on morning's young body insomnia fed.  
I rose revengefully with a jar in my hand,  
groped my way up and smashed the jar,  
stamped my feet and called out all sorts of names.

And in fretful tears I waited for the door to open:  
it remained in deafening silence and maddening stare.  
I turned the knob with a trembling hand:  
every object was rusty and swallowed in dust  
as if no one had walked on the floor for years.

### WE WAIT FOR THE LAST LIGHT

We seem to be alone and eagerly watch  
for the first light to come through the window  
as the first unexpected guest of tonight.  
But that does not happen; there is a light  
dwindled into the sphere of distance

or enlarged. Yet we do not want that.  
We sit coaxing a strange proximity,  
thinking of the end of this game of patience  
as the cards grow damp under the nervous palms  
and the first light is lost among the others.

Now the room is dark, perhaps midnight,  
who knows as time has so many subdivisions.  
The drainpipes, I hear: they run towards  
the finish. But I am hurled back  
into the dark cellar of my childhood:

why should we wait now? I can still  
climb trees and reach the sun, before even  
the most nimble birds could move their wings;  
I can still trace furrows in the sky  
as bright winds plough the clouds.

But we must wait, not for the first light  
but for the last to go out and leave space  
to the first cosmic ray to come through.  
This window, the aperture of our perception,  
has formed frozen and melting sides.

The drainpipes run as if all the gods  
have had their last wash and now retreat  
on tiptoes but with sharp ejaculations  
towards the first light of tomorrow.  
Must we wait, though, and stake

our last stars, and I unnecessarily  
live in a past that you did not share?

## Through a certain window

H. E. FRANCIS

Sometimes when the sun streamed in her freshly polished windows, the breeze gently stirring her choicest white curtains, Mrs. Marion Carter (Alicia to that miniscular circle on First Street) felt as if she had been bottled on the floor of the sea and brought up suddenly to view the nature of this world. Before her, worn bald by the wash of time, the Reverend's head gleamed like a piece of old china wedged in the depths. Beneath it, his clean-shaven, excessive jowls folded over a mercilessly tight collar, the Reverend stared into his book with the conscious immobility of a trapped prey.

But the sun, heralding joy as it did, was mistaken. It had come to the wrong place, she felt. For it belied the darkness within them. Her husband was deep in a gloom evident in his stark stillness. Usually he was robust with a fiery energy which propelled his body in fierce, expulsive movements. And the intrusive sun only reinforced the gloom while emphasizing the threadbare patches in the carpet (Marion had promised to turn it), heightening age-yellow stains in the wallpaper, exploring those darkened corners so neatly concealed on cloudy days (though the parish *had* just affixed a new roof, attached eavespouts) . . . and the china, the fading antimacassar, the hardwood floors, which now bore dust—a disease spreading over the bookshelves and knickknacks, around her trays of African violets.

Well, the board of trustees would be here at any moment and, she supposed, several of the church elders, which meant, of course, those who were well-fixed, who had an interest (she smiled, thinking in *my husband*) in the Church, which she knew to be synonymous with *my husband*. That, of course, was the crux of the situation: the Reverend Carter and the Church were one and the same, and the sins of the Pastor were visited upon the Church (that, at any rate, made sense in her experience). In sympathy with Marion, she rose, her eyes tracing the knot on the back of his bald head—a sign of great intelligence, she mused.

"Marion, dear," she ventured, coming near, but he did not respond except that his eyes flicked perplexedly.

"Marion," she said lightly.

"What *is* it, Alicia?" Nor did he look up. He scarcely ever did. So busy. But she sensed his anxiety.

"I'm fixing some lemonade. Wouldn't you like some before the others arrive? It might relax you."

"Relax me? There's no need for relaxing me, Alicia. Thank you."

"Oh," she murmured, disappointed. Then she would have to have hers alone. At the doorway she hesitated. "You will call me as soon as the meeting is over. . . ? Marion. . . ?"

"Yes, dear. It won't be too long, I think, though I can't say exactly. I'll let them in."

"All right. And, Marion—"

"Yes, dear?" His exasperation bit. She frowned.

"Oh, nothing."

She went out, closing the door behind. So he didn't want her to know. So good of Marion, but then didn't he always spare her? But oh, she knew, of *course* she knew, though she never told him that; he wouldn't allow it because he feared losing face. After all, he *was* the fifth in direct line of the ministry. She glanced at the array of five miniatures on the dining room wall. "Collecting dust too," she murmured spitefully at the sun.

In the pantry she squeezed half a lemon into her glass, dropped two ice cubes into it. Lemonade—her latest innovation. ("Alicia, *do* try it, just a touch, it's so soothing. Martha and I, you know, after the meetings, always cut up a bit.") She poured without measure a generous helping of gin over the cubes, added Seven-Up, careful then to replace the bottle immediately behind the electric fryer standing on end in the lower cupboard.

Lydia was right: it did soothe; it straightened out the ridges in her day. She wished she could get Marion to try it. He was the one who really needed it. After all, though she had no wish to be blasphemous, it had stood on her right hand for some time now, easing her Church club doings, but mostly it had rounded the edges of Marion's criticism, especially after her wretched *faux pas* in trying to introduce the first Negro family into the Church. And

God knew she could do without his harshness after listening each day to the parish heartbreak as it sat in this person or that, crowding her living room even on the brightest day with the darkness of woe.

So the lemonade had cleared the air. It created a warm flood in which she felt all her life, past and present, close around her. Once it had even brought her through two weeks' lonely vacation in Virginia while Marion was on a trip (his fifth) to see his psychotic daughter. Everyone ought, he said, to be alone occasionally to achieve perspective. Still, she had wandered alone in the Shenandoah Valley, like the grim mate of an extinct species. But she *had* gained perspective.

The bell rang. At last! But she didn't move. Marion would go. She needn't see them and bother her head about business. Was that what he meant? In the dining room, Granny's hand-me-down Chippendale mirror (which will soon be gone too, she mourned) sent back her own look of gratitude. She drew close, annoyed at the red fibers that spread in spidery clutches over her eyeballs, the sharp lines in inverted brows under her eyes.

Footsteps and a submerged rush of voices. Ten o'clock sharp. Such punctuality! At any *other* time. . . . The reality of their muted voices struck her now with the full force of the danger so imminent in their sound. Damn them! she murmured suddenly, breaking. Poor Marion. She wanted to send her hands through the plaster, through the walls to embrace him. Oh, she did it too, in her mind, but would he feel them? For she knew why the trustees had come. Why didn't Marion *know* she knew? How have I concealed it from him? Her eyes welled with tears that trickled unheeded down her cheeks, into the pink dimity she had so flip-pantly worn this morning, to cheer him perhaps. But again catching sight of her face, she wished the mirror might refract the truth onto the ceiling, away, anywhere.

Self-shunned, she returned to the pantry. What would go on in the living room? Were they all there: Ellsworth, Rayburn, Campbell, Duckworth, Benson, Rolfe, Hawkins? Oh, she could see them with Ellsworth heading the committee of inquisition. All very secret, naturally, what with the other denominations eagle-eyed

for any discrepancies whose detection might heighten their own rank and file on the town's scale of esteem.

It seemed there was a slight miscalculation of \$1500, a rather marked discrepancy between the bills submitted for the year's building program and their payment. Fifteen hundred dollars. A tidy sum.

She'd first had the tale from Lydia Campbell at the Flower Committee meeting some days ago because Lydia and she were so close, Floyd being a trustee. "As urgent as the matter is, Floyd says it'll not be discussed until the next meeting at the parsonage. Keeps the public eye away, if you know what I mean." Alicia did know. "And you know what one whiff of this tale might lead to. . . ." Lydia's words rattled on, mechanically. The conversation was worn out in Alicia's head, a broken disc murmuring with the fastidious regularity of a heartbeat: fifteen hundred, fifteen hundred, *fifteen hundred*. . . .

Ten five. She rinsed her glass, set it in the pantry cupboard, and withdrew. She had to stop off at Lydia's on her way to the Paulsons. From her bedroom, changing, she looked down on the cars parked in such extravagant dignity beside poor Marion's '55 Chevy. She chose her most delicate old silk voile, and, owing to the sun, she could wear her mercifully flattering picture hat. Though she seldom made-up, she managed the least bit of mascara to minimize her reddening eyes, and then a slight intensifying of the dark lines, hoping for a bit of glitter. After, she selected a few of her choicest inherited gems and set them decisively into her purse.

She went out into the Saturday morning world, feeling its rather exuberant welcome in the warm breeze, the swing of willows, though the wind pressed against the emerald grass like one of the invisible forces of this world—which no doubt are ever active, she thought.

She ambled down First Street with a comfortable nonchalance which belied the turbulence identified in her mind with that now in her own living room. What was poor Marion going through at this moment? Had they thrown the discrepancy in merciless accusation at him? (She nodded to the Bennetts—red-faced little Adele flagging from the car. *Mrs. Carter out for a Saturday morn-*

ing call, no doubt. Was that what they thought?) Fifteen hundred dollars. The sum made her giddy. Her legs trembled. She felt about to cry. In all their married life Marion had never spent that much on themselves. But of course she couldn't cry. She shook her head, held it up to catch the drying breeze.

Rounding into Shake's Lane, Alicia saw Lydia in the window. Lydia rose and met her at the door.

"You look positively wonderful," she said, adding softly, "Have they arrived?"

"They're at the parsonage now. Of course, I didn't hear. Marion doesn't burden me with the business of his parish, you understand."

"Were they quiet? I mean, you didn't hear anything . . . well, explosive?"

"Oh, I left at once. I knew you'd be expecting me. And I've a call to make—the Paulson woman. She's almost well now, but I know it's lonely there, they being the only Negroes in town and all. Not many friends. It's rather sad, really."

"But how can you think of that pawnbroker's family at a time like this, when Marion . . . ? Well, there's no telling *what* they're throwing at him now, but Floyd says there won't be any question, they'll accept the money, feeling as they do about the Church, as if it were—and it *was*, in their eyes—a slip-up in counting, a misplacement, whatever they do make of it."

"Then you did have Floyd return the money to the briefcase?" She sighed, a broken dam, freeing herself at last.

"Yes, the one Marion left in our hall. Floyd will ask the Reverend to check his own briefcase. They know he's beyond dispute when it comes to affairs of money, that he'd never. . . ."

Slowly the tears slipped out of Alicia's eyes, down her face. But she did not speak. She dared not, fearing what might come out.

"Alicia . . . I'll get you something. Perhaps a drink?"

"Yes. Yes, that would be fine," she murmured, thanking her with her inflection, and a nod. They understood each other so well. Oh, they'd had their trials, though Floyd had money now, a great deal. She'd no idea how much, but who cared? He had it. And he was their most loyal deacon.

"There!"



"Oh, thank you, Lydia. You always know just the right thing."

And they fell to talking, about the rummage sale on Saturday next, the old blue sweater she'd made might be given up, incidentally Lydia's oldest boy, Jim, would be home by that day from Dartmouth, Floyd wanted to meet him, they'd bought him a car for the forthcoming graduation, they might surprise him in Boston—

"Boston!"

"Yes, we haven't been since the summer excursion. Remember how seasick you were on the ferry going over?"

"Oh, yes!" The thought itself was nauseous. "Boston," she murmured. "It's where Marion's daughter is. *You* know, by his first marriage. Before he was ordained." She smoothed her dress, water dribbled from the glass like tears onto her hand, her eyes followed the rivulets. She raised her eyes, wavering a smile at Lydia. "Such a child she must be. Had a bad marriage herself, Marion tells me. Once in a while he has to stop off to straighten her out. I don't know actually what the trouble is. He never says much about her. Afraid I'll worry too, I think. He had, once, to spend an entire week with her while I—" The green valley flowed like a sea into her vision. "—spent the time, quite uneducationally, in the Shenandoah. You remember the talks I gave, facts I'd collected about the old South."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"No, I never have." But she wanted to say: Yes, in Marion's eyes, he carried her there, she was imprisoned there for days, sometimes weeks, after he'd seen her. "I . . ."

"Would you like another, Alicia? There's plenty."

"No, I must be going. I want to get back before the meeting's over. It must be so humiliating for him." And she rose, not knowing actually how to thank Lydia for managing the proper relocation of the fifteen hundred. But there was something more: she wanted to tell her about the source, but she couldn't. There was pride. Lydia would understand. She merely said, "I borrowed the money, you know."

"Yes, but Alicia, you could have had it from me."

"No, they'd know at the bank that you had withdrawn that amount, and you're so near to me, in the same circle. You see? So

it's better this way, it hurts fewer people. . . . Well, it's getting on, I'd better go."

"Alicia, you will be careful, dear?"

"Oh, yes, yes." She kissed Lydia on the cheek.

"Goodbye, Alicia."

Goodbye. Yes, goodbye. She crossed the street in the direction of the town dump, where coils of smoke wound lazily skyward. She walked slowly, for she had no real desire to see the Paulsons today. No. Truthfully, she was afraid to see them. But she clutched the bag like a dear old friend, which gave her some support, and made her way down Wash Lane, a bright little street really, if you could ignore the dump in the distance. At the end, quite imposing since they'd remodeled, was the Paulson house, a huge white gleam in the sun, a garden beautifully tended, a house replete with love. As she opened the gate, the dog barked, a little Pekingese that bewildered her with his defiance.

"Hi, Mrs. Carter!" The little boy (five? she'd forgotten) hung from the garage roof.

"Oh, be careful, Sandy! How's your mother this morning?"

"Good, I guess. She's just went back to bed. But she had breakfast with us."

"Oh, that's wonderful! Mrs. Paulson?" she called through the screen door and across the living room. So much space, so beautiful. "Are you awake?"

"Why, Miz Carter! Come in, come in."

"I can only stay a minute. I didn't get by yesterday. The Reverend's so pressed these days, but I did promise to talk to your husband today about a little matter. Oh, you look so well, Mrs. Paulson."

"Myra. How many times have I told you? Myra. After all these weeks tending me, you ought to—"

"I know, but it's hard to remember, when you so often have to maintain distance . . . Myra."

"That's better."

"Sandy says you got up for breakfast."

"Yes."

"Just think, you'll be moving around freely in no time. I suppose until you've been bedridden yourself, you can't realize how

wonderful it is just to be able to move, no matter where you go."

Outside, a locust vibrated the air with its fierce current. The wind came with a rush into the room. Mrs. Paulson was laughing. "Yes, I'll be digging into corners in a few days. It's positively filthy in here."

"Ha! Why, it's beautiful, so clean and healthful." And it was. It had a latitude to breathe in. It made her feel life flood joyfully through a certain window of the soul, though you had always to be careful and maintain the right perspective.

"Ah . . . Win! Oh, Win!" Mrs. Paulson cried out the window.

"Don't disturb him. I'll go out. He's on his way back to the shop, I'm sure."

"Then he can give you a lift. You needn't walk."

"Oh, that'll be fine, if it's no trouble."

"Trouble! After all you've done? Win, you take Mrs. Carter home when she's ready."

"Anytime," he called.

"Come back soon—whenever you can find a free minute. Or have lunch with us. And bring the Reverend too."

Alicia crossed the dining room, the living room, through this house she now knew so well. *And bring the Reverend*. After their rebuff! Well, she had been so hard-put to explain to them (though no explanation was necessary) that it would save Sandy grief if he grew up with other Negroes somewhere, if he weren't hurt because one of us rejected one of them. Oh, it was all so confusing! And after she had dared invite them into the Church. "But the Bensons, the Rayburns . . . all the fine families of this town, Alicia, did you consult them when you presumed on human nature by confounding the duties of this house with your own desires?" Presumed on human nature? She didn't know what he had meant. What *was* human nature anyway? Then, when Mrs. Paulson had come down with severe flu, Alicia didn't for a minute wish her to feel that she tended her for any reasons of apology. But Win, dear Win, had proved they understood, hadn't he?

He called to her now. "You didn't really *have* to come. I know it's a bad morning for you, and there's always a time for business. If it came to that, there's no need to worry about it at all."

"Business is business, Win, and the pleasure I've had in this house. . . ."

"Well, I wanted you to know anyway, Mrs. Carter, that not many come here, even if I am—why shouldn't I say it?—the wealthiest pawnbroker in the county."

"But I'd never feel right if I didn't repay you, Win. So . . ."

"Come on, I'll take you home. You can talk in the truck."

He helped her in. Such a gentleman. She waved toward the window at Myra tilted over the pillow. "Bye."

She opened her purse. "I brought you several pieces of my mother's own jewelry," she said.

"Mrs. Carter . . ."

"No, please. Only, I know you'll be sure that they're sold, if they are, in the city, where no one will know."

"Of course."

"And the other things, I'll see that you get them—one by one. The Reverend, he . . . well, he might not be able to get used to their absence, especially the big things, if they go all at once."

"I understand."

She smiled. "I knew you would. I knew the day I asked for the money." She didn't like to mention the money. "It was fine of you to let me have it in this way," she said. "I'll never forget it."

"Would you like to get out at the hedgerow?" There were no houses there, just before turning into First Street, and she knew he was trying to exercise the utmost caution so that no one would suspect the source of the money.

He helped her down and held her hand tight. "You're sure you want to give them up?"

"It's only right. An arrangement is an arrangement. We made, after all, a deal."

"A deal." He smiled.

She withdrew her hand and sauntered leisurely down First Street, pretending not to hear his goodbye. The day, after all, was bright and there was (*he* had created it) a certain balance which bespoke the momentary rightness of things.

Ah, the meeting's not over yet, she thought with renewed dejection. The cars were still rowed along the street.

In the house she unpinned her hat, fluffed her hair with a bit of

measured coquetry, bit her lips alive, drew her eyes softly with the tips of her fingers, and settled by the window to wait. Nothing came from the living room but a rather steady flow of single voices. But she smelled the men—the tobacco, inescapable odor. She decided to change her dress, which only careful preservation (for how many years?) had kept looking like yesterday's.

And then she came down, sat to wait, casting restless eyes which inevitably swept across weeds that *would* come, despite her work and Jim Blake's once-a-week tear through the garden. Weeds. That they could grow so fiercely up around the delicate stems of her prize flowers irked her. She rose. The kitchen floor needed waxing, she thought, halting for a moment to catch a sudden raised voice from the living room. Nothing. Poor Marion. How can he endure it? She crossed to the pantry and made herself a drink . . . and sat, staring across the lawn.

By the time she'd had three drinks, Alf Benson's new red auto rounded the corner. She watched for the others. After a long lull, she opened the living room door softly, listened . . .

"Alicia?"

"Yes, Marion. Have they gone?"

"Don't you know?"

"Well, I saw Alf Benson's car from the kitchen window."

"You mean to tell me you weren't listening?"

"Marion! I just opened the door. You *know* better than that."

"Do I?" His eyes rolled up at her in a measuring squint. How worn he looked. For all its heaviness, his face was haggard—oily and sweaty—and his cheeks sagged with a lapdog weariness under his eyes.

"I *didn't*, Marion."

"Well. . . ." He placed a sheaf of papers in a folder, riveting his eyes on the blank folder as if reading the invisible there.

"Was it bad, Marion?"

"Bad?" His jowls quivered, his eyes at once suspiciously narrow.

"I mean, it was a long meeting. Was there a great deal to settle?"

"The usual business." And was that all? Was he not to tell her, not this time? not ever? Must he always hold back the trouble side? Didn't he know that by holding back he made her share

inordinately? She felt like a hulk, listing. And then he said, "And a matter of money, some missing funds. Fifteen hundred dollars, to put it bluntly. But it proved to be a mistake. The funds were, fortunately, in the Campbell files, in *our* briefcase, right where they should've been, undeposited." His eyes closed for an instant, and he fell back, wheezing, into his chair. "Well, that little matter was settled in a hurry, not so painfully, with the help of God."

Her eyes swam. With the help of God. She felt particularly unsteady, watching his tired frame sunk in the chair, so she reached out to steady herself against the sill and slip down easily onto the window seat.

"Alicia," he said, "I've been thinking. We've served our term in this parish, and it's just about time I asked for a transfer. I know I've a little while before the usual time of transfer, but if I requested it this afternoon by letter—they'd never refuse—I could make the preparatory announcement of it in church in the morning. They won't like losing us, they never do."

"Yes," she said, straightening her hair, feeling a tremor of her head which Marion might notice. "Then maybe we'll have time to take a trip together. You need a rest, Marion. And I've wanted for so long to go west, somewhere in the Rockies. My father wrote long letters about them before he died. I still have the letters."

"Yes, I've thought of that. As a matter of fact, I've been meaning to mention that my daughter wrote last week. With things the way they've been, expecting the meeting and all, I didn't know how to answer it, but—"

"No!" She lurched up from the window seat, staggering clumsily toward him. He spread wide and high in ugly undulations in her blurring eyes. "Let me *see* the letter," she cried.

He glared at her. "Alicia!"

"I *want* to *see* the letter. I've never *seen* all those letters you got from your darling, *ex-pensive* little daughter."

"Alicia, I warn you!" He stood. His eyes grew large. He appeared unusually massive, but she did not cower.

"You're *not* going to Boston, you hear me. I want you to go on a vacation with me, Alicia Carter, your *wife*. You're not going to see that woman!"

"You're drunk! I told you—"

"Yes, I'm drunk. But not too drunk to know you're *not* going to Boston. Are you? *Are* you? You're going on a vacation with your wife, not with a daughter that doesn't even exist. You were *never* married, and that cheap little thing you've been running around with all these years—Ohhh . . ."

He struck her. He stared fixedly and with the back of his hand struck again. "Stop it. Stop it." she cried, holding the wall, a terrible nausea gripping its unbearable claw in her stomach, and, almost unable to breathe, she stumbled through the dining room, up the stairs to the bathroom.

She slept until late afternoon. She came down, bathed and dressed, but with an unspeakable weariness in her. In the dusk the rays of the sun, broken and slanted, appeared like long fingers beckoning through the darkening trees.

She went into the kitchen, turned on the oven, drew out her pans, and set the table for supper. For a moment she listened to the familiar sounds: the tap running, the gas clicking in pre-heat . . .

When she was through arranging the food, she went into the living room. Marion was sitting at his desk in the familiar huddle, his pen in his hand, scrawling that welcome scratching that always cut the early evening gloom so comfortingly. He had brought in the *Saturday News*. She opened the paper and sat, rustling the pages occasionally, ranging the columns, but her eyes did not function. She didn't see the paper at all, only Marion, through the pages, across this room which held them both. Marion, she said silently. He stirred slightly, as if he had heard, and she smiled.

He was sorry, she knew that. He would never say it, but she could tell in his hunch, in his averted gaze, in his humble silence that filled the room with a rhythmic pulsing which she understood all too well.

So they would go now. A new parish. She looked out the window at her garden, where the weeds were obliterated now in the falling darkness, and at the sun crashing its last-minute cries against the approaching darkness on the windows of the house next door. A new parish. And what would that hold? But she knew, and whispered a silent hope that she might outlive Marion.

For no matter where they went, it would be the same in that other quiet jungle. But she would be with him always so that he would never discover the frightful truth. Marion, she called silently. Marion . . . And she put her unmoving arms around him and held him, she touched his forehead comfortingly, and leaned over and kissed his cheek. And sitting there, she knew he felt it.

## APRIL SNOW

(Colorado)

By DOUGLAS NICHOLS

Unseasonal snow melts as the sun holds sway . . .  
Last night it rained, then changed to morning snow:  
It was a trick of April Fool's day,  
Canceling April's play for a March-like show,  
A festival of white heralding green—  
As though the brown and rainy god of spring,  
Belatedly betrothed to the Snow Queen,  
Had made of marriage one climactic fling  
Of snowy tributes: Priests in robes of white  
Bowed to the married season. Dancers stunned  
In attitudes of praise held to their light,  
Arboreal poise. And what had once begun  
In showering tears became as chandeliers,  
Crystalline white . . . Now we are free to drive  
The car in the gleam of sun as the sky clears:  
The streets are flowing and I feel alive  
With the spring thaw. I recall three daffodils,  
Graces saved from the snow, set off in a bowl  
Of clear cut glass: I see a corona of hills  
Enriched by springtime's green and brown and gold.



## Attic salt

HAZEL E. BARNES

A dramatist with more plays than recognition is no rarity. At the opposite extreme we have had Menander, blessed for centuries with the most enviable of reputations and not a play to show for it—not, that is, to show to anyone later than the Romans.

There has never been any question as to *where* Menander belonged in the history of literature. As the most esteemed of all writers of New Comedy at Athens in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C., he was the successor of Aristophanes but hardly his heir. Where the Old Comedy was political, Menander's plays were domestic comedy, his plots and characters more specific and individual, his satire much less so. Whatever Aristophanes might choose as dramatic setting, his real stage remained the Athenian agora; Menander's was the private citizen's home and even more particularly his kitchen and bedroom.

In literature as in art the early Hellenistic period prized the realistic. The Greeks liked Menander's comedies because they seemed a slice out of what might have been the spectators' own lives. "O Menander, O Life," exclaimed Aristophanes of Byzantium, "which of you has imitated the other?" When the Roman dramatists, especially Terence, chose Menander as a favorite model, the family line was established forever. Molière and Shakespeare would have had genius without Menander, and the lesser progeny would have found other writers to copy. But as the world and the theater have been, Menander cannot be disclaimed as the direct ancestor of a large part of European comedy.

At the same time the part of Missing Link, however important, is no proper role for a dramatist, and this until recently has been Menander's fate. That the Greeks and Romans admired him was clear. But later scholars have had nothing on which to base their own judgments except a few fragments appearing here and there as quotations in various ancient works. Since people have an unfortunate though quite natural habit of quoting what is most

detachable and least dramatic, the remains of Menander resembled something between selected sayings of Oscar Wilde and the Book of Proverbs. Discoveries of papyri in the late nineteenth century brought to light large parts of three plays, including several complete scenes, of a quality which suggested that the Greek admiration was well founded. But it was still impossible to judge the dramatic structure of a whole comedy or to test the playwright's skill in developing the plot action.

In 1958 the Bodmer Library in Geneva brought out the text of a Menander comedy which had suddenly appeared in a private collection of papyri in Switzerland. The play is complete save for a few, seemingly unimportant lines occurring where the third century papyrus is torn. One may imagine the shade of Menander to be both pleased and anxious.

*The Dyskolos*, also translated as *The Curmudgeon*,<sup>1</sup> has a fairly simple plot with none of the complicated confusion of lost infants, mistaken identities, and incognitos which enmeshed much of New Comedy. The scene is laid in Attica in the backward village of Phyle, which possesses a famous sanctuary of Pan and the Nymphs and little else beside. Pan himself comes out of his shrine and obligingly tells us the background of what we are about to see. Cnaemon, a poor farmer with a formidably bad temper, had married a young widow with one child. She stayed with him long enough to bear a daughter but finally could not endure him any longer and moved to a separate house with her son, Gorgias. The daughter remained with Cnaemon and is just now grown up. Because of her devotion to the Nymphs, they and Pan wish to help her. When Sostratos, the citified son of a wealthy farmer, came to Phyle to hunt, Pan caused him to see the girl and fall in love with her.

The action begins as Sostratos enters, looking for the slave whom he had sent to Cnaemon as prelude to an offer of marriage. The slave rushes on terrified. Cnaemon, before even learning his business, had driven him off the farm with clods, stones, pears, and threats worse than all three. After a brief glimpse of Cnaemon, Sostratos decides to wait awhile.

There follows a series of amusing events all connected with domestic utensils. The daughter appears with a pail. It seems

that Cnaemon's old woman servant has let the bucket fall to the bottom of the well. The daughter wants to get some water from the shrine. Sostratos gallantly offers to fill the pail for her. At this point the slave of the girl's stepbrother intervenes. He sends the girl inside and reports to his master Gorgias that an Athenian dandy is hanging around to make trouble. Gorgias remonstrates with Sostratos, accusing him of plotting seduction or rape, defining the latter not passively as the fate worse than death but in the active voice as "a crime deserving of a thousand deaths." Learning that Sostratos' intentions are honorable, Gorgias is placated and even consents to help. The best plan, he says, is for Sostratos to put off his city style cape (Sostratos is *from* the farm but not *of* it), take the mattock, and go dig in that part of Gorgias' land which is near to Cnaemon's. There he may have a chance to see the daughter and perhaps might impress Cnaemon favorably by his hard work. Sostratos sets off amidst delighted chuckles from the slave, who anticipates the soft youth's sore muscles.

Next a large crowd appears seeking the sanctuary. Sostratos' mother, who is excessively religious, has come to honor the god with sacrifices and at the same time to feast herself and her friends on them. The cook and the slave have brought provisions galore but no cooking pot. Attempts to borrow one from Cnaemon win abuse and curses. The cook decides to roast the mutton on a spit. Then Sostratos returns from digging. His back is breaking and he has been disappointed in not seeing either Cnaemon or the girl, but he is pleased that his family has come to the spot and persuades Gorgias to join in the feast.

Suddenly there is great excitement at Cnaemon's house. First the old woman, at Cnaemon's insistence, tries to fish up the bucket with the aid of the mattock. Inevitably she drops the mattock. Cnaemon has the woman lower him into the well, and the rope breaks. Gorgias and Sostratos run to the rescue. As the offstage action is reported, we learn that Gorgias goes down after Cnaemon; Sostratos and the girl hand down the rope, Sostratos paying more attention to the girl than to the well and twice letting Cnaemon drop back in consequence. At last Cnaemon is saved.

Cnaemon's narrow escape effects the peripeteia. He admits that he has wronged his wife and Gorgias, and he promises to adopt

Gorgias as his own son, to deed over to him all of his own property, and to let Gorgias see to arranging a dowry and marriage for the daughter. When Gorgias presses Sostratos' suit, Cnaemon refuses to take any part in the matter himself; but mollified by Sostratos' sunburn and farmworn look, he agrees not to stand in the way. Sostratos' own father is persuaded to give his consent, and everybody except Cnaemon goes over to Pan's place to celebrate.

At this point the comedy might well have ended, but Menander evidently felt the need for one more scene. The cook and his assistant, still smarting from their recent ill treatment, decide that it is not enough that their master has won Cnaemon's daughter. They plot revenge and a forced reformation. Cnaemon, still suffering from being half-drowned, is lying within asleep. They carry him outside on his mattress, then pretend that they are a whole host of people pounding on the door and trying to borrow things. After watching him storm away helplessly, they talk with him seriously about all that he is missing in life and finally persuade him to come join in the festivities, more resigned than convinced.

*The Dyskolos* is at once comedy of character and of society, just as Cnaemon is both an irascible individual and an exaggerated portrait of the typical Attic farmer. Cnaemon's bad temper is a little more than simple irritability. One might say that he manifests simultaneously a distempered disposition and a deliberately distorted will. To begin with, he is *dyskolos*, the word happily translated by Gilbert Highet as "the curmudgeon," but more literally meaning "the difficult man" or "the man hard to get along with." Pan describes him as a "nonhuman human" (*apanthropos anthropos*). Cnaemon "has not uttered a pleasant word in all his life or ever spoken first to any of his neighbors except when absolutely forced to it or in passing before me, Pan. And even this I'm sure he immediately regretted!"

Such characterization is akin to the doctrine of humors. Cnaemon is perpetually angry by nature, endocrinologically if you like. His hostility spares nobody; it needs no motivation but only objects. He has allowed himself to live, we might even say he has

chosen to *be* as one preferring to look on all existence as a threat and each encounter as a hostile challenge.

A more complex aspect of Cnaemon's behavior is suggested by an alternative title which the papyrus tells us was sometimes given to the play. This is *The Misanthrope*. As a hater of mankind, Cnaemon is not merely biologically irritable. He holds a grudge against humanity but feels that he has reasons for it. I do not mean that we have here, any more than in the quality of "dyskolos," a psychological motivation in the contemporary sense. There is no suggestion of a case history background to explain just how Cnaemon got this way. His misanthropy has a social, even a philosophical cast. It is a reflection of his daily struggle with the inhospitable, barren, rocky soil of Attica. Menander universalizes and sympathizes with Cnaemon's lot. Sostratos' friend says, "There's something terribly bitter about the poor peasant. And not just this fellow. Almost all of them." Later after a particularly savage outburst, Geta, a slave from the wealthy household, exclaims, "The poor wretch! What a life he leads! There's the true Attic peasant all right. Struggling with these stones which will bear nothing but thyme and sage, enduring all the pains but never harvesting anything good."

Yet the one quality absolutely lacking in Cnaemon is self-pity. His self-content is manifested in his statement that he would allow his daughter to marry only a man exactly like himself, a possibility which, even without Freud, Gorgias regards as unpromising. Cnaemon expects the world of men to be as relentless as the stony ground, and his defiance of it is magnificent. In his first speech he says that he envies the hero Perseus, who had wings enabling him to get away from people and the Medusa head with which he could turn anyone who looked at him into stone. "If only I had that head! There'd be no lack of statues anywhere!" On the other hand, Cnaemon is almost touching when at the time of his change of heart he tries to explain his lifelong hostility. If he has set too high a value on self-sufficient independence, it is because he was sick of watching other men's merciless and egotistic struggle to better themselves at others' expense. Everyone is concerned for himself alone. If this is the way of the world, then he resolves to stay out of it, harming nobody and asking nothing of anyone. His

near drowning convinces Cnaemon that he has been wrong on both counts. Obviously he cannot exist without others, and quite as evidently there is at least one man, Gorgias, who is willing to help another out of pure altruism. Cnaemon treats this event as a philosophical demonstration. His attitude has been incorrect, and he is prepared to make amends.

But if the misanthropy is cured, the *dyskolia* is not. The choler remains, and Cnaemon expresses it by his ungracious refusal to participate in the betrothal ceremonies and to join in the celebration. Hence we need the final scene in which he shows himself willing to attempt a new character, to make himself open to the gentler, less grim side of life. Menander does not suggest that this will be easy or that Cnaemon has suddenly become as easygoing as the sleek Callippides, Sostratos' father. But if he doesn't fall into step with the dancing girl at the party, he may at least look at her. And he may sometime in the future occasionally bounce the grandchildren on his bony knees.

This type of comedy is akin to but not quite the same as the comedy of character which we find in the work of Molière. The French playwright, like Menander, was fond of building a play around a dramatic personality consisting of a single character trait reduced *ad absurdum* or blown up *ad magnificum*. (*The Miser* and *Tartuffe* are obvious examples.) In Molière, however, the plot is usually concerned with out-witting and defeating the one-sided protagonist. In *The Dyskolos* Menander goes a step beyond. It is not only the plans of the curmudgeon which must be thwarted but the inner character itself which must be overcome, voluntarily forsaken, and transformed. That this type of dramatic problem interested Menander is apparent from the long section extant of another of his plays, *The Arbitration*, where there is a scene portraying the self-reproach of the smug, self-righteous husband.

Of the other characters in *The Dyskolos*, Sostratos and Gorgias are the most interesting, and they manifest even more clearly than Cnaemon and Callippides the contrast between sophisticated elegance and peasant integrity. Like Cnaemon, they are almost but not quite pure types, and for each one the plot reveals rather unexpected facets of character resulting from their action upon one another. Sostratos at first appears to be a quite silly young man.

Not quite spoiled, he is at least highly pampered; his generosity is of the easy sort which ministers at once to those about him and to his own good opinion of himself. Even his decision to marry instead of to seduce Cnaemon's daughter seems less noble than foolish. He has had but one glimpse of her before the play opens; neither he nor the audience is treated to more than a few hysterical sentences from her as the action develops. Sostratos himself speaks of her as a "rare statue." The girl has no name (she appears merely as "the daughter"), and Hightet remarks that this is because Cnaemon has never thought of giving her one. But surely the neglect is Menander's, and it must be deliberate. That Menander was perfectly capable of complex and sympathetic feminine characterizations is adequately demonstrated in *The Arbitration*. That he does not offer one here is, I believe, due to his desire to heighten the comic effect of Sostratos' excessive infatuation.

In the first act Sostratos is so typically the rich young fop in pursuit of an idle whim that one rather expects that by a comic application of the hubris-nemesis concept, he will be brought low and shown up for the fool that he is. Either that or else there will be an interplay between the Athenian's subtlety and the clodhopper's credulity. But the expected does not happen. It is the oaf who tricks the dandy, but the dandy, once fallen into the snare, proves that he can meet the farmer on his own ground. Gorgias suggests that Sostratos work with the mattock as a strategy to bring him close to Cnaemon and the girl. Neither father nor daughter appears, and we realize that Gorgias knew they would not. It was a trap to test Sostratos, to see how he would react as for the first time in his life he encountered an obstacle calling for hard work and physical endurance. Sostratos, once he perceives that the only Attic salt which Cnaemon respects is the sweat from the Attic farmer's brow, comes through.

Gorgias as well is subjected to a little friendly jibing. Over-serious in the beginning, having "never had time to fall in love," he is shy and embarrassed at the idea of joining the woman's picnic. But he is easily persuaded by his new friend that a pleasant life too can be a good one. When Sostratos and his father offer to marry off Sostratos' sister to Gorgias, the latter utters a short protest against marrying above his station, then speedily concludes



that, his independence having been put on record, he would be senseless to refuse. In the homely optimism of Menander's comedy the citizens of Attica, rich and poor, urban and rural, come to each other's aid as all good subjects of Athena should.

In its portrayal of city and country ways, *The Dyskolos* shows its affiliation with the comedy of manners as well as with the comedy of character. In contrast with the Aristophanic play, its plot is, of course, realistic, not fantastic, quotidian rather than bizarre. Yet this strict realism is combined with the appearance of Pan on the stage, an epiphany which was hardly more common in the life of the post-Alexander Athenian than the visible presence of the Virgin today. I do not mean to say that *nobody* had seen Pan—no more than I would say that no human eye has seen the Virgin. Visions have ever been real to their beholders. But not usually in comedy praised for fidelity to the everyday routine. Actually, while I doubt that the average Athenian had much more expectation of seeing Pan in his home than Alexander the Great, it is unlikely that he felt Pan's appearance in the play to be a jarring note. He was used to seeing the gods in various types of dramatic productions and would accept divine presence as mere literary technique. In any case gods were still officially believed in at Athens, and Pan was one of the more domesticated ones. The spectator could allow him on the stage as easily as, perhaps considerably more comfortably than, we receive the heavenly visitors in the folksy musical *Carousel*.

Nevertheless, since Menander apparently prided himself on the representational quality of his dramatic art, we may well ask why he felt it desirable to introduce a god and what function the deity performs. Quite definitely Menander's intention is not to give serious support to sentimental piety. To be sure, Pan remarks that the daughter's devotion to the Nymphs has made them and him want to help her. But the girl's service is merely an anthropomorphic motivation for Pan, as is surely indicated by the fact that while everyone enjoys drinking and stuffing in celebration of the god, nobody thinks to thank him for bringing events to a happy conclusion. Pan is not a *deus ex machina* in the usual sense of resolving an otherwise irresolvable complex of plot. He contributes nothing to the *meaning* of the play. I can find no evidence



that he functions as a symbol for a philosophical concept (as do the gods in *Hippolytus* or in the *Oresteia*). Pan's contribution is wholly literary, but it is important.

First of all, Menander has used him to unify the different episodes of his plot and to bring the characters together. Granted the existence of Pan and his grotto, it becomes entirely natural that the citified Sostratos, out on a hunting trip, would stop in at the shrine and catch a glimpse of the girl who lived next door. And what more probable than that Sostratos' pious mother would pay attention to a dream which Pan sends her and add the sanctuary at Phylae to her already long list of sacred spots to be visited. Her desire to be comfortable while worshipping and to turn a prayer into a party brings the whole household along. Everything is set for a neighborly borrowing of pots and buckets and for the ultimate matchmaking. It is all very much like a small town church social.

Although the comedy does not say so in so many words, we may gather that Pan provides still another kind of unity. This has to do with the chorus. By Menander's time dramatists had long since given up the practice of using a chorus to comment on the events of the play or to express ideas of the author himself (in contrast to those of the *dramatis personae*). At the same time it was as desirable then as earlier (particularly in view of the lack of any curtain) to indicate breaks in the action and lapse of time. Writers of New Comedy settled the matter by simply entertaining the audience with a choral interlude, which may have been a dance without any accompanying lyrics. Often there was no attempt to integrate the chorus in any way with the play itself, though the spot at which it was to appear is clearly marked.

In *The Dyskolos*, however, Menander has written into the text indications suggesting that he is endeavoring to give the chorus a natural place in the comedy. At four places (in each instance a point which we would think of as the end of an act in a five-act comedy), there is the word "Chorou." The first of these is immediately preceded by the words (spoken by Gorgias' slave), "I see some people coming here to worship Pan, and they're a bit high. I guess it's better not to get in their way." The other breaks, too, follow after the characters go into the shrine to take part in the

religious feast. It seems clear that the chorus is the group of Pan's devotees, who dance to honor their god, perhaps semi-seriously, possibly comically because of their inclination to serve Dionysus as well. Since dances were a common occurrence at all festivals, whether religious or secular, the presence of the chorus in *The Dyskolos* is not a dramatic intrusion.

The worship of Pan serves also to initiate a gentle satire on contemporary religious practices. Sostratos' mother is perhaps the first in a long series of literary portraits of rich women who patronize the Church and its works as a way of filling up their time. She is forever visiting temples and sanctuaries. If she were ever to dream of a Pan in Macedonia, says her slave, she would start on the instant to organize a caravan northward. Menander builds up the comic effect by having the complaining slaves enter loaded with piles of mattresses and coverlets for the guests to recline on, with baskets, pots and pans, food and drink of all sorts, including a whole sheep. We don't need Cnaemon's caustic reminder that the real thought here is for the pleasure of the guests and not the god.

The way these scoundrels sacrifice! They bring mattresses and decanters, not for the god but for themselves. A little incense makes a pious offering, and a sacrificial cake—this you put on the fire and the god gets all of it. But those people offer the gods the stub of the tail and the gall bladder, because they're inedible, and the rest they gulp down themselves.

It is noteworthy, however, that Cnaemon doesn't offer any real meat to the gods, "not so much as a snail," the slave Geta says. Economy and frugal nourishment are obviously as much to be recommended for deities as for mortals.

This is not to say that *The Dyskolos* is primarily a satire in any serious sense. Most of the gags provided by the minor characters are variations on the perennial jokes which the Greeks enjoyed or at least tolerated for several centuries. Thus Geta comments on the gluttony of the women who "wouldn't share a grain of salt with Demeter herself!" Again when Sostratos, speaking of preparations for the wedding, says, "We must have a fine drinking bout for you men, Papa, and a night vigil [a religious watch] for the women," Callippides corrects him. "No, it will turn out just the

opposite. The women will drink, and it will be we men who keep the vigil. Of that I'm sure!"

A somewhat more amusing use of stock types is Menander's treatment of the cook. Like all comic cooks, Sikon knows that cooking is the greatest of the arts, and he has become habituated to the deferential homage due to great artists. In addition Sikon plumes himself on knowing the right condiments for making people as tractable as his ingredients. When Geta fails in his attempt to borrow Cnaemon's cooking pot, the cook scolds him for asking "like a crap-eater."

Some people don't know how to do these things. But I've got the knack of it. For I, of course, provide my service for thousands of city people. So I'm always pestering their neighbors and getting supplies from everybody. If you're going to ask for something, you have to be a flatterer. Let an old man answer the door—I at once call him "Father" and "Papa." If it's an old woman, "Mother." If a middle-aged woman, I call her "reverend priestess."

The cook tries out his "Daddy dear" on Cnaemon and is threatened with the whip. He tries to save face with Geta by explaining, "It's possible to beg favors skillfully, but, by Zeus, it makes a difference whose door you come to!" Later Sikon views Cnaemon's fall into the well as punishment direct from Heaven.

Now the Nymphs have avenged me on this fellow—and justly too. Nobody can wrong a cook and get away with it! Our art has something holy about it. But you can do whatever you like to a busboy and not worry!

A shade higher in the social scale is Chaereas, identified in the *dramatis personae* as "The Parasite." This species of hanger-on, comparable to the improvident in-law of more recent comedies, was expected to make a token gesture toward earning his meals by performing delicate or dubious missions for his retainer. Menander portrays him as a futile sort, more bustle than business. When Sostratos in the first act appeals to him for help, Chaereas is shocked at the idea of going so far as marriage for love and voices rather pompously the sensible view of conventional sophisticates.

With regard to such matters, Sostratos, my opinion is this: One of my friends falls for a call-girl. Immediately I snatch her up and carry her

off. I get drunk, I rage like a house afire. I won't wait to discuss the situation. Before even finding out who she is, we have to get hold of her. For love greatly increases with delay and fast subsides if it is swiftly satisfied. But if anyone talks about marriage and a free-born respectable girl, then I'm another man. I inquire as to her family, her habits, her character, and everything which has bearing on the future. For then I am preparing to leave with my friend a memorial of the way I manage this sort of thing.

Sostratos' rebellion against this kind of prudence starts out as purely romantic, even irrational. Later when he finds out more concerning his girl and her family, he too indulges in a bit of shrewd calculating which is in part rationalizing and partly a crack at the feminine half of society, a complaint as old as the other half of it. Sostratos exclaims,

O most honored gods, the things by which you think to put me off make my purpose twice as sharp. For if the girl has not been brought up among women, then she is ignorant of the evils in life which she might otherwise have learned from an aunt or nurse. But since she has somehow been raised nobly by an uncultured man who hates evil—how could it be anything but a blessing to win her?

Sostratos is typical of the man who despises deceitful Woman while wanting nothing so much as to enslave himself to a naturally innocent girl.

Realistic—at least up to a point, gently and not very pointedly satiric, concerned with character types and with the friction between city and countryside, *The Dyskolos* is emphatically a domestic comedy. In at least three ways. To begin with, the play is concerned with individuals and their private affairs; it is absolutely non-political. There is not a single reference to dishonest politicians. Alexander might as well not have existed or Pericles either. One line may possibly be an oblique allusion and a pun on the Peripatetic philosophers: Sostratos says he will now speak up for himself since he is tired of all the *peripátous*, a word which means either going to and fro or philosophical discussions. One will hunt in vain for any mention whatsoever of those names and ideas which are the *sine qua non* for historians of the period.

In another sense the comedy is so homegrown as to be positively intramural. The game is, so to speak, between the New Yorkers and the old Vermonters, the New Yorkers in particular wanting

nothing so much as to convince themselves that these eccentrics are different from themselves and yet the "good old American type." Though I doubt that Menander was cherishing any high civic purpose, the Attican Chamber of Commerce might well have been pleased.

Finally *The Dyskolos* is domestic in another, quite unusual way. This is the curious fashion in which household objects and other items of daily use seem themselves to hold a role of importance, almost a life of their own. Thus part of Gorgias' prejudice against Sostratos arises from Sostratos' wearing the *chlanis*, a particular kind of cloak or cape, normally worn by women but affected by some of the Athenian men. Except that it stems from a different social level, its symbolic value would be comparable to that of today's black leather jacket. When Sostratos is willing to exchange this garment for the farmer's goatskin, Gorgias is reassured; it is this same goatskin which utterly horrifies Sostratos' mother when she sees him wearing it in the dream sent by Pan.

It is the kitchen utensils and farm tools which really take over. In *The Frogs* Aristophanes had represented Dionysus as accusing Euripides of having transformed the tragic conflict into a pantry squabble.

Now every Athenian householder, the minute he comes in, shouts at the servants, demanding, "Where is my stewpot gone? Who has gnawed off the head of the sprat? The bowl of yore has deceased. Where is the garlic of yesterday? And who has eaten the olive away?"

One might think that Menander had decided to bring this scene to life. For Sostratos it is the mattock which torments him like a personal demon. It is Cnaemon's need for a mattock to use in turning over the manure in the courtyard which leads him to discover that the maid had already dropped it in the well while trying to fish up the bucket. The rotten rope drops him into the water as he goes after both bucket and mattock.

Actually, although the group of worshippers are present as the result of Pan's desire to marry Sostratos to Cnaemon's daughter, Cnaemon himself does not even know of Sostratos' interest until after his own conversion. What he was very much aware of was that Geta and Sikon were trying to borrow a pot. This, apparently one of a long series of would-be borrowings, throws Cnaemon

into a tantrum. When the cook and slave torture him at the end, all they need do is to pretend that they are a mob of borrowers come to ask for Babylonian coverlets and other scandalous luxuries which Cnaemon has never even seen. But of course Cnaemon's own daughter had earlier gone over to beg a pail of water from Pan's attendants, and this had resulted in Sostratos' meeting with Gorgias.

The most amusing of all these domestic props is alive. That is the sheep which Sikon brings in to serve double duty as sacrifice and entrée. The cook has been having a hard time of it.

This sheep is an animal of no ordinary portent. . . . Damn it! If I try to hold it up and carry it, then there in the air it fixes its teeth in a tender branch of a tree, eats the leaves, and pulls with all its might. And if I put it on the ground, it won't move forward. It goes backward. I, the cook, am just about beaten to death from hauling this creature over the road.

Given the probable waywardness of a live sheep on stage, this scene could be uproarious. Its humor is typical of *The Dyskolos*, not subtle, yet not quite slapstick either. It is the humor of everyday in which men—despite Aristotle—are portrayed neither better nor worse than they really are. They simply fuss about among their possessions, bother and resent their neighbors, and come to the rescue when someone falls in a well.

When Menander entered *The Dyskolos* in the state contest, the judges awarded him the prize. I think they were probably right to do so—though admittedly we have no way of knowing the quality of his competition. In attempting any evaluation of the play, we must be careful, particularly if in doing so, we mean to pass final judgment on Menander. Latinists have been justly irritated by centuries of criticism which tended to give the Greek models credit for everything good in Roman comedy and to blame the Latin playwrights for all that is naive and unsuccessful. Such classicists may easily be pardoned for their vociferous insistence that Menander's newly discovered comedy is not equal to the best that the Romans produced. They are right. Yet *The Dyskolos* is certainly far better than the poorest of Plautus and Terence. I,

for one, should be willing to argue that it is well above their average.

In any case the question remains as to how typical *The Dyskolos* is of Menander's work. We know that it is one of his early comedies. (It was produced in 317 or 318 B.C., whereas Menander lived till 291.) More important is the fact that both the fragments from his other plays and testimony from Greek critics indicate that Menander's comic range was very broad. In this respect he may well be compared with Molière. Much as one may love *The Physician in Spite of Himself*, one could hardly claim that Molière's reputation would be in any significant sense the same whether one judged its author by this play or by *The School for Wives*. *The Dyskolos* is closer to Molière's farces than to his more sophisticated comedies. We know that Menander could on occasion be at home in the drawing room as well as in the kitchen. His fragmentary *The Arbitration* is much more penetrating in character analysis and approaches the true problem play.

Yet while we must not yield to the temptation of seeing in *The Dyskolos* all of Menander, we certainly need not say that we have nothing more here than a piece of juvenilia. It may not be its author's *Tempest*, but neither is it *Two Gentlemen from Verona*. Menander chose to take his audience out for a day on the farm. The entertainment is rustic, but the corn is good.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>This is the title given to the play by Gilbert Highet. His translation has been published in this country in the July, 1959, issue of *Horizon*. I have used my own translation in quotations. The Greek text has been prepared for publication by Victor Martin. *Papyrus Bodmer IV. Ménandre: Le Dyskolos* (Cologny-Genève: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1958). This edition includes translations in English, French, and German as well as photographs of the papyrus.



## Two poems

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG

### INCUMBENT

Rated high among the incumbents  
is my propitious uncle, who  
with pouter-sentiments swelling  
above his stomach will expound  
on opulent predictions. Seat ye,  
gents, on chairs of confidence  
and sob with his pince-nez, mule  
with his glares about the momentous  
ticking of time in his favor.

Ah, what a commensurate bastion  
of striped trousers encompasses  
his sublimations; it could really  
be that his facile feet danced  
with the saints. I am perhaps  
too close of blood—watching him  
rosy like a hippo from his bath—  
to let him shine even in wistful  
chiaroscuro across my destiny.

Dedication easily waxes and wanes  
over his countenance, and only  
kittens reach for the mouse of soul.  
I merely hold his fame in abeyance  
for his untimely demise at some  
fallow time of the year, when  
my eulogy mortal-cum-immortal  
might appear in a patriotic daily  
offering a prize-contest-obit.



### HARPIST

David, David, play on your harp,  
play gentle autumn on each of its shy  
and limpid strings; David, gentle  
this reluctant autumn from winter,

they said: my father, my mother,  
my ruby-red uncle, my aunt who had  
wits un beholden to death. David,  
they tinkled with harp-sound wiles,  
your name is the harpist's, it is rife  
and marvelous and wholesome for love.

I tinkled my harp: David-David.  
I strummed my thinking to musical rhyme,  
like a seagull's slackening sinking  
to blackening water and winking doom.

They said: he plays, he gentles, so well,  
he coaxes hope from pain and remorse,  
till we can sing with melodious hoping.  
All the while, David-David, tinkled my harp,  
a timid name, a hidden lust, a fallen  
innocence, but all their faces nodded.

Nodded and were appeased, were forgiving  
and transported. I watched my knuckles  
white against the plangings, against  
taut cobras rising from loin to heart,  
from mouth to sporting eyes, and played  
against David, the disastrous and uncertain.  
Yet my father smiles, my mother shuts her eyes,  
my uncle pivots on his pelvis, and my aunt  
with death at arm's length waltzes,  
and there is none to see my destruction.

## Three poems

CHARLES PHILBRICK

### ANNUAL ENDING

In a wind that levelly tears at the tiring trees,  
Gives ivy on chimneys the motions of iridescence,  
And scars the blue sea in its healings of white,  
Graying ocean and sky, making all greens the same—

We see

The quick typography of geese against the clouds,  
Going upwind south, nervously sure in their progress;  
And clasp our cool, weathered hands, holding fast  
Ourselves and our summer against the cold onslaught  
Of winds that turn seasons, of greens that will go,  
Of seas that heave snowdrifts, but swallow all snow,  
As they've drunk down the sun on this late summer day.

The closing of windows I sing,  
And the kindling of dry-log fires;  
The quilting of borrowed beds,  
And the bundling of yearly desires.

### HOME FROM THE SEA

Home from the sea to our built-on hill we find  
Excess of hedge like, out of hand,  
A Spring burn-over mouthing the house—  
A fuse that celebrates itself—and a lawn  
All tall assertion, gone to seed,  
Exclaiming green around a dog's dried  
Indecencies. Thorny whips of rose-vines climb  
To kiss their curses, pale, profuse and pink  
Against the curling shingles nailed around  
Our great mausoleum of stale air and undisturbed dust.  
*Glad, in a way, to be home; good the trip's over—*  
And maybe the home will be glad to be rescued from summer,  
The silence inside, and the audible growing outdoors.

### TIMOTHY, NEARLY THREE

He runs in crabwise caracol along the beach,  
Playing shout with the wind and tag with the tireless sea.  
His ten quick toes barely print on the sand  
The sign of his prancing the waves will erase;  
But I see the wave lifting as green as a season,  
And know that this air-boned boy will disappear.

## The day of the year

SYLVAN KARCHMER

On the bus going to Stevens—a three-quarter of an hour ride through the drab industrial section—Hortense sat rigid, contained within herself. From time to time, inhaling the spring air which seeped into the bus, she was reminded of how Jennie had loved the lemon smell of the April magnolia trees. But otherwise she had no thoughts, for all her thoughts took her back to the one moment that it was her death to recall. The bus she hated, and in particular the necessity of sitting next to a stranger, but taking the car meant among other inconveniences getting involved in the heavy bridge traffic; it meant too returning alone at night, driving against the city lights, and the sight of them always gave her a peculiar ache.

She was skilled these days in containing herself, and when she desired she could remain relatively immobile for hours, her mind a vacuum. Ahead a few miles was the cemetery. She prepared herself now by doing nothing more than idly examining the old man who sat next to her. He pretended to occupy himself with the creased want-ad section of the morning paper, but she saw that he in turn had been carefully scrutinizing her. He had silvery hair, parted orderly in the middle, and the clean line of his cheek recalled Papa Sam standing in a corner of the room whistling an Old Country air.

She was not wholly surprised, therefore, when the old man spoke. "I'm going to the ball game," he said, moving his head so that he looked directly at her and spoke as if they had been chatting for hours. "On Sunday there's a ball game at Marsalis Park and I'm taking it in."

His smile was shy and revealed his teeth, the color of her faded ivory brush, she thought, and then he continued conversationally, "Did you see that windmill at Irving? Well, let me tell you about it. It's a sound principle, but when you stop to think about it, what kind of life is there to a windmill, going round and round.

Now you take ships—ships are different. Never could resist reading about sailing vessels.”

And as he spoke he handed her the smeared want-ad section he had been holding. Her eye fell briefly upon the small bold type, advertising used furniture and appliances.

“Ships,” he repeated, “ships going everywhere—” And a shaking finger pointed to the clipping.

Where—where were the sailing ships in this inland paper, she wondered, trying to follow him as he continued in his twilight world of reality and dream, talking now about a ball going from first, a speedy ball that couldn’t be stopped and then he started talking about the game. “It’s the life of the game,” he said with that precise clarity that characterized the speech of old men and which was one of the things she remembered about her dead stepfather, whom at times in the distant past she had mistrusted. “Then,” he said without changing his tone, “then they used this new drug on me—thorozone. I was pretty much burned out and they used it and it’s made a new man out of me.”

“Yes,” she said, and at once she knew that he was from Woodlawn, the state institution for such unfortunates. The bus stop for Woodlawn was several before the fashionable Stevens section where Aunt Gertrude lived. Even now she could see ahead the grey crenelated towers of the fortress-like building, and her first impulse was to get up and find another seat but in the next minute she reasoned around her fears. He must be a trusty, to be sure, and then, glancing at his innocent old face, she knew how safe she was . . . with this pitiful old man. But imagine—sitting next to a crazy man! She could hear herself telling the girls at Sarah’s tonight when she played mah jongg.

She played every night because it never did any good to stay alone at home; at least company kept her from brooding. The girls, like herself, were divorceés, past child-bearing, past too all the spontaneous first pleasures of life; they clung together like flocks of brilliantly plumed birds always in flight. At night they played cards or mah jongg, and during the day they visited the sick or sewed for the poor.

Every fourth Monday she went as a member of the Story Teller’s League to the Simpson Memorial Hospital for Crippled Children

and read wondrous stories of adventure in the dragon land of China where young warriors rode forth to slay the wicked and succor the young. How the children—afflicted with everything from rickets and polio to epilepsy and elephantiasis—loved these stories and how keenly they awaited her visit! Their plight haunted her. She could always see their crutches, their truncated legs, their misshapen heads, their iron lungs; yet, whatever their malady, they remained alive, demonstrating some triumphant principle of life that had been denied her own child. Always she wanted to gather them close to her, as if each particular one was her own Jennie, but they were distant by blood; their sores, boils, abrasions, mutilations, touched her only remotely, and they remained, collectively, the Monday afternoon activity on which she reported to the girls.

Someday, she thought, listening to the old man, someday I must go to Woodlawn to read to the patients there.

"Thursday is movie night," said the old man now and his voice trembled with excitement. He leaned forward, his finger touching her shoulder. "There are talking movies now. I think in all the motion picture houses you'll hear them talking in the movies."

She merely nodded again, thinking how long he had remained absent from the world. "Ah," he said, guessing something from her expression, "I'm talking wild again," and he smiled a sad apologetic smile. "But you know what life is like up there. And I'm not sure if it's Thursday night I go or if that's the night we play dominoes."

She sensed his pitiful confusion and once more the image of Papa Sam flashed into her mind. "It's movie night," she said reassuringly.

The bus had slowed momentarily, caught in the bridge traffic. All about them cars honked for clear passage, and she could smell exhaust fumes. She fancied herself being quietly suffocated.

"Oh boy," cried the old man at her elbow. "Look at 'em." His finger pointed out the cars struggling to pass. "Watch the big one with wings in the back!" And he clapped his hands in excitement. "That was fun," he said after they were on the bridge. "Well, I was saying, I'm going to have a busy week. I've got to

keep it all clear in my mind. The movies—the ball game—now when did I say I was going to the ball game?”

She told him.

“Thank you,” he said and chatted about the game while she looked beyond him out the window opposite her. She could see the brass gates and high above, almost out of sight, the stone angel of peace, and again she was in the slow procession moving down Forest Avenue. I must see the angel, she thought, but a heavy van blocked the view. She looked for the gates of the cemetery (she came out once a month, alone, and always brought white roses) and instead she saw the placard. “*Life—Life*,” it read. “Read *Life* Regularly—32 Million Readers of *Life*.” It was done in bright reddish colors that made the letters as appetizing as sticks of peppermint candy.

For an instant the bird took flight; moving, it ascended before her in full view of the window, and then again the *Life* truck caught up with the bus and blotted it out. The old man was still talking. “Did I tell you that I’ve got six million dollars in the bank at Kaufman. And if I could just get my hands on it! Not all of it, but just a little—”

He stirred, his eyes closing. “You know, I might give you a million,” he said. “If I could just get my hands on it.” He moved his head firmly. “Yes,” he insisted, “you’d get a cool million.” He smiled apologetically. “You know, the treatment doesn’t always work, but I’m grateful for the little free time it does give me.”

The bus had stopped. It was Woodlawn and ahead the tower bore down on her like a gigantic prancing horse ready to leap forward. The old man, hearing his stop called, jumped up and started for the door, but before turning he leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. “My dear,” he said gravely and soberly as if he weren’t half-demented with his mind a piece of worn-out machinery that would never run again, “thank you for your kindness.”

“Goodbye,” she said, “and when I come to Woodlawn we’ll resume our conversation.” A crazy old man kissed me, she thought after he had gone—a crazy old man who didn’t know what he was living for. She remembered his smile and thought it would be something to tell the girls. She was amused to have such an odd

tidbit for them, but actually what passed through her mind was that it was the first time she had been kissed that way since Jennie's little lips had pressed against her forehead.

The memory occupied her until she came to Aunt Gertrude's. Here the entire house was festive; still in the doorway, she could smell the hot spiced corned beef, the pungent horse-radish and pickled relishes, the sharp cabbage roll, the expensive cigar smoke, the sweetish hot wine of the punch; and, as before in her girlhood days, over all these smells hung the aroma of perfume and incense, like mist in the valley, blending with and sharpening all the other rich odors of the house. In the library half a dozen relatives were standing by the mantel, drinking a toast. *Chaim*, she heard, *Chaim*: the festive word, the toast to long life. How often had she heard it from Papa Sam without really giving her mind to it.

She had no blood ties with these people; they were her step-father's, but since childhood she had been a spectator of their rich holiday celebrations, their *Seders* and wedding feasts and *Bar Mitzvahs*, and all the other fetes and festive occasions that brought them together. They were the only kin she had, and insofar as she could, without ever admitting it even to Papa Sam (to whom she had never been able to confess her affection) she felt drawn to them.

As soon as the relatives recognized her, they surrounded her, kissing her and squeezing her hand, mauling her with their rich lavish affection, as if that could compensate her for what she had lost. Did she want a martini, they asked, or a screwdriver, or a glass of hot punch made with sweet Kosher wine. Did she want to hear the new recording of that bombastic Berlioz Symphony upstairs on hi-fi? Or perhaps she would like to join the family barber shop quartet which they were getting up for the occasion. Perhaps later they would play charades in the Blue Room and would she like to participate? She could be Washington crossing the Delaware or Atlas holding up the world or Liza fleeing on ice. Or she could play poker with the menfolk in the den. They'd never invited Arnold, in all the years she was married to him, to join them because he was a man of deep gambling instincts, who played not for companionship or good cheer but for blood, and this was not their way.



Molly, a cousin of Papa Sam's, who lived with Aunt Gertrude in this big slate-colored house, came up to Hortense and rescued her from the group. Her freshly waved hair was a blue color. She carried a tray of sandwiches and nibbled on one as she held out the plate to Hortense. "Try one," she insisted. "Here's a heart and tongue." She took a bite. "It's delicious," she said. And nothing would do but that she must press the rye bread sandwich into Hortense's hand. If only to placate her, Hortense took one, but she had hardly made the selection before Molly exclaimed: "Oh, what am I thinking about! You mustn't fill up on these. Come into the living room and see the two turkeys we have. They're beautiful. Thirty-five pounds each and stuffed with chestnuts and oyster dressing."

And she took Hortense by the hand and led her into the dining room where the two fowls lay on blue and golden platters, elegantly brown with their stomachs extended upward, stuffed with dressing and sewed up again; they looked like two reclining dowagers, bedecked and bloated, while standing guard over them was a great salad castle glittering gelatinously in transparent reds and yellows.

"Ella baked the turkeys in Josephine's oven," said Molly. "It was the biggest one in the family. I thought you'd like to see them before that pack-hungry bunch descends upon them."

Ella was Aunt Gertrude's cook and had been with her for thirty years; upon occasion she baked for all of them, and there were few things in the family she didn't know.

"Aren't they wonderful," said Molly. "Just too beautiful for words! Now don't run away," she added as Hortense started for the hall. "Just stand here and admire them, and let me slice you a piece of that delicious dark meat."

"Thank you," said Hortense, "but I'm not hungry."

"Oh, who's hungry," said Molly. "Just eat anyway. That's what we all do."

Hortense shook her head and backed into the hallway. She was still holding the heart and tongue sandwich. She put it on a small end table and glanced through the opened doorway into the brightly lighted living room where the family was holding court around Aunt Gertrude. Here the traffic was tremendous. The old

lady was ninety, and the entire family delighted to pay her homage. She sat in an armchair which was covered with purple brocade, in a corner where the lamps were turned low; behind her the drapes had been drawn against the outside light, and slabs of sunshine trickled into the room between the cracks. Her hair was pure white and done up in a single bun at the back of her head. The concealed light bursting through here and there haloed her head and illuminated the deep caverns and sunken recesses between her eyes. Ella had rouged her cheeks, and the cords in her neck quivered whenever she turned her head as if invisible messages buzzed through them. Against purple brocade, there was a transparent quality about her. She was blind and had been since 1945.

She sat with folded hands in her dark corner, the immobile nonagenarian, waiting, useless, helpless. Surplus, yes, thought Hortense but without bitterness, for she herself bore too many grudges against her life to be conscious of any animosity toward poor Aunt Gertrude whose only fault was that she was still alive. Who stayed and who went was beyond the reckoning of anyone in this room, as Papa Sam would have observed, but a final irony remained for her. Yet before she could contemplate it, as she invariably did whenever she saw Aunt Gertrude, someone touched her arm. It was Ella, moving unobtrusively as always, a part of the family background. She wore a white rayon dress and her glistening hair, like Aunt Gertrude's completely white, stood out from the deeply-etched lines of her dark brown forehead, which was the color of richly stained mahogany. The silver tray she extended to Hortense held a tall sherbert glass filled with fruit salad, or, as it was called in the family, ambrosia.

"When I heard you were coming," said Ella, "I made this for you." Hortense hesitated before taking the glass. "It's got all kinds of fresh fruits in it," said Ella. "Oranges, apples, grapes, pineapples, figs, dates—you just try to think of something I left out."

As a child the dessert had been Hortense's favorite; wherever she went in the family they prepared ambrosia for her. The last time she and Jennie had eaten supper at Aunt Gertrude's, Ella had made a big bowl of it; and now in the noisy, over-lighted

room, a shrill girlish voice, like a breath of honeysweet memory ("Oh, Mother, just look! Ella's put in marshmallows, too!") came rushing out of her mind, like rain filling the dry gully. She closed her eyes. "Thank you," she said to Ella, her voice under control. "Thank you so much."

Ella put a firm hand on her shoulder. She had known Hortense too many years to stand in awe of her. "Miss Hortense, when are you going to start talking about that girl?"

Voiceless, Hortense made a gesture with her hand and the cloud passed instantly. "It's all right," she said. "It's all right now." But she did not meet Ella's eye. "I'll eat before I leave." She waved in the direction of the room. "Everyone's turned out, haven't they?"

"They all come when there's food," replied Ella. "Your Auntie done think it's her birthday. It makes her feel good to think it's her birthday. About every other week she remembers it's her birthday." She took the tray with the glass. "I'd better see about her; she's probably sitting in a draft."

Hortense was well within the room now. Here was the heart of the party, and a pleasant hubbub of conversation filled the large room. All were familiar faces, her distant kin. Someone called a girl's name, Eva; and a young wife in a maternity dress, that gave the youthful figure an incongruous appearance, stepped out of her circle and stationed herself directly in front of Aunt Gertrude. The old lady put out a small shrivelled hand and in a gesture that was hardly more than a feeble pat, like the caress of a child's hand upon a doll, touched the girl beneath her blouse. "*Chaim*," someone whispered behind Hortense.

"Look," said Molly, who had been nibbling on a turkey stick, "look, she's blessing Eva's baby."

The girl stepped back and Hortense relaxed. But in the next moment above the general hubbub she became aware of a strange sound. It was as if a bird were singing over the night noises of a lighted city but one submerged deep in a valley so that only its lights gleamed. The room was suddenly alive with melody. Puzzled, she turned to see from where it came. Who was singing in this room, she wondered. She searched for Ella, who had gone to close a French door behind Aunt Gertrude, and she saw instead

Molly, who, still munching on her turkey, told her, "It's Mamma singing."

Yes, the old lady was singing. Hortense could see the lips moving against the folds of the purple brocade, and for a minute she was reminded of Papa Sam coming down the stairs of the house on Forest Avenue and whistling the fragment of an Old Country folk song. "What is she singing?" Hortense asked.

Molly shrugged. "Mamma insists upon Yiddish these days. She won't talk anything else but Yiddish and no one understands a word she's saying."

Hortense, listening again, felt her heart quivering as if a part of it had awakened after long slumber. "What—what is it?" she asked again.

"Ella's the only one who knows any Yiddish anymore," said Molly. "She still remembers the little that Mamma taught her."

Across the room Hortense saw Ella and made her way over. "I don't rightly know," said Ella after she too had listened to Aunt Gertrude. "But it's a song she used to sing when Miss Molly and Mr. Alvin were babies. When she was just a young mother and running this big house and helping Mr. Marks in the store in the afternoons and then coming home at nights and doing her own baking and canning and all."

Ella listened once again, her dark finely-sculptured face intent upon the old lady. "I can't recollect the words no more, Miss Hortense, but I can just see her singing . . . like when she was young again."

And then guessing from Hortense's puzzled expression that she hadn't explained, she continued, "She's just singing, Miss Hortense, just because it's in her nature to sing—"

"But—but—" Hortense's words came almost involuntarily. "But—she's blind."

Ella's firm hand was on her shoulder again. "Now, there, Miss Hortense," she said above the shrill sound of the melody, "maybe she's singing so she won't have no mind to recollect—that."

The late afternoon sun streaming into the room seemed to break through the barrier of the drape. Distant fire glowed behind the curtain. The singing continued, but now the word had gone around that the turkeys were being served, and there was a mass

exodus for the dining room. Others, however, thronged in, carrying plates heaped with food.

Someone raised a glass. "*Chaim! Chaim!*" From all sides Hortense heard them calling out: "*Chaim!*" Aunt Gertrude, too, heard the word and made it a part of her song, and Hortense, recognizing again the foreign expression, shivered inwardly as if fire had touched her. She moved automatically from the new group forming around the old lady, but then Aunt Gertrude, perhaps sensing that Hortense passed before her, raised her rouged cheeks with their sunken caverns that reflected bits of the late afternoon sun. The sightless eyes sparkled, still burning with life, and only then did Hortense understand what Ella had told her.

It had been a strange afternoon. The demented one had kissed her; the blind one had sung for her. And now one of the relatives had given her a glass. With them, she raised it. "*Chaim,*" she whispered the toast, and then in a firmer, louder voice—"To long life—*Chaim!*" And she drank with the others. . . .

## TAHOE, FROM ECHO SUMMIT

By JEANNETTE GOULD MAINO

The sight denies the petal-smooth cement:  
This is discovery.  
The lake is fresh, seen by sunrise,  
No eye before explored, no hand has trailed  
Behind a boat, no tool has cut the clear  
Lapis-colored lake.

But, now below, the blue  
Is smeared and shiny (oil-slicks  
On the water, tin-glitter on the shore)  
The sticky tracks of human snails.

## Reading drama

MORRIS FREEDMAN

Toward the end of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus engages in a long disquisition comparing the lyrical, the epical, and the dramatic in literature. He concludes that the dramatic is the highest form, for in the dramatic, "the personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. . . . The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." In short, drama is superior to lyric or epic because it is least subjective; the intention of the author is never made explicit; the action speaks for itself.

Certainly one of the great attractions of drama, even on the stage, is that the action does live itself out, apparently without the manipulation or intercession of author or any other intermediary. The events, the speeches, the details of plot, even the setting and such other devices in produced drama as the music and the lighting, all seem natural and inevitable. At least they should seem so, and, of course, in a good drama and a production respectful of the text, they are so. Joyce was emphasizing the objectivity of drama. There is no author in drama to comment on action or character, as in the epic or novel; what the people say or do is not what the author himself might say or do, as in a lyric. Indeed, to carry out Joyce's comparison of the playwright with the Creator, a play with all its people and events has an existence quite independent from that of the author. Sometimes, the author is the last person to consult about the intention of the play. The play speaks for itself, and does not always say precisely what the author wanted it to. "What I have said, I have said," Ibsen replied to persistent questions about what he meant with one of his plays.

Perhaps all this is so plain that it need scarcely be said, much less labored. Yet a produced play cannot ever be as objective, as

free of control, as Joyce said drama in the abstract is. If the author is not always present in the theater next to one's elbow, whispering in one's ear, turning one's head this way or that, then certainly everyone else connected with a play is, from the composer of the incidental music to the director of lighting. For a produced play is more than the reading and acting out of the text; it is a spectacle of which all the elements speak to us. Eric Bentley, reviewing Elia Kazan's production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, remarked that if the word were not so "inflammatory," he would suggest that there had been "collaboration" between Elia Kazan, the director, and Tennessee Williams, the author. Surely one of the elements that made *Death of a Salesman* such a moving play on Broadway was the setting, requiring Willy Loman to walk through invisible walls and up and down series of stairs as he flitted between the past and the present, across the borders between memory and reality. As Robert Warshow pointed out, in a brilliant and by now classic essay in *Commentary* examining Miller's play, Loman was trapped right there on the stage, like a rat in a labyrinth groping for an exit.

Nor should we forget that when we go to the theater, we engage in a communal ritual; we submit ourselves to becoming part of an audience; we respond as a member of a group. Drama, as we know, has its origin in religious rite. Both in pagan and medieval times, productions of drama were consciously intended to develop a community response, to evoke awe and piety, to "purge" or instruct the viewers, or otherwise to transform or affect them. Doubtlessly one reason television drama which slavishly imitates a stage production fails is that it has no single large audience but a multitude of tiny audiences, and the original totality of response to the play in the theater is fragmented into millions of little responses.

A produced play always implies a collaboration between the audience and the business on the stage. We never suspend our disbelief in the theater in quite the same way or so thoroughly as when reading a novel or poem or play. I remember the near anguish of the audience, largely children, watching *Peter Pan* on Broadway, when Peter steps toward the footlights and asks everyone to start applauding and shouting "I believe, I believe" when



Tinker Bell is about to expire because people no longer believe in fairies. The extent of our belief in the action is emphasized by how often members of an audience cannot contain themselves and shout out to the actors, or even, as in the recent incident involving *Look Back in Anger*, climb onto the stage and belabor the villain. Very well aware of this, Pirandello has used this continuum between play and audience to construct some of his most meaningful works, exploring not only the areas where reality and appearance blend, but, more significantly, the interaction between reality and appearance, the effect of a play and the players on the audience, and of the audience on the play and players.

A dramatic performance is a conspiracy, then, to affect the members of the audience in every way possible. If the spoken words alone and the movements will not communicate sufficiently or with just the right modulation of intention, then music may be added, or lighting, or even all sorts of details in setting. In one experimental play produced in the twenties in Paris, of which one intended effect was to distress, a brilliant searchlight was flashed into the eyes of the audience, blinding them, and chalk was scratched across a slate blackboard to chill the marrow. *The Glass Menagerie* was played in half darkness on Broadway, for, as Williams tells us in his notes on the production, the setting is "memory." And the bleak, harsh, unshaded extremes of Strindberg's *The Father* would undoubtedly be emphasized by a production done in plain blacks and whites, preferably the sharpest whites obtainable.

The most significant single collaborator the playwright has is the actor. (I exclude the director for the moment, for he after all pulls together a whole company of collaborators, major and minor.) Powerful and persuasive actors can not only make the same text take on different meanings for audiences, they can often confuse the author himself as to his original intention, as Shaw suggested. "The actor's excess of power," Shaw commented in discussing the relation between the text of a play and its performance, "would still carry its own authority and win the sympathy of the author's histrionic instinct." Against the author's better judgment, or in violation of his own intentions, Shaw intimated. We all know how differently Shylock has been interpreted



in different periods; we are also familiar with how different a play *Hamlet* can become in the hands of various dramatic virtuosi.

I would not wish to be understood as suggesting that there is anything wrong with a text taking on all sorts of meanings, additional ones and even contrary ones, in performance. So long as the final effect is legitimate, I see no cause for complaint; a work of art is justified in and of itself and not in relation to its fidelity to something else. The accuracy of the relation of Shakespeare's plays to their sources, for example, is never a criterion of his success. (And, of course, the familiar but purely arbitrary question of how faithfully a movie or play follows its inspiration in a novel or a short story or a biography is obviously unrelated to the question of its success as a movie or play—although one may always make comparisons in terms of aesthetic ends.)

John Gielgud's *Hamlet* was as effective and "right," at least for myself, as Olivier's, however apart the two were in their understanding of the play, and I found myself reasonably stimulated by Maurice Evans's two *Hamlets*, the uncut one and the Victorian one. Many texts, it need hardly be said, will play much better than they read. Shaw's *Misalliance* is not one of his most sparkling plays to read, yet the performance in New York with Barry Jones was a great delight, and quintessentially Shavian. No silent reading of *The Way of the World* can possibly communicate the wonderfully quick, sparkling quality of a performance, in which the many possibilities of inflection, diction, and pronunciation, the plain mouthing of language, bring out the fundamentally verbal quality of Congreve (and, incidentally, emphasize the degree to which this play of 1700 is already part of the movement away from the brutality of action, thought, and feeling of Wycherley and toward the sentimental, talky comedy of Sheridan).

Yet while we may be pleased and instructed in various ways by the performance of a play, it remains for us to read the text to understand it and even to enjoy it fully as a work of literature. No matter how many times we see *Hamlet*, we always go back to the text, often indeed provoked by a performance to do so, to look at the words again, to linger over a phrase, a sentence, a speech, a scene. "I have never found an acquaintance with a dramatist founded on the theatre alone," Shaw wrote, "a really intimate and

accurate one." This is surely obvious to anyone who has seen, say, Olivier's *Oedipus* and then read Sophocles. We are tremendously moved by Olivier's passion, but for understanding Sophocles, in order to add the response of the mind to that of our senses, we must go to the bare bones of the text. This is especially so when we see a verse drama or listen to poetry. We may let ourselves be carried away in the theater or lecture hall, but it is to the library that we go to find the intellectual source for our response.

Shaw, in the preface to his volume of "unpleasant" plays, makes a persuasive argument in favor of reading a play, and, especially, reading it with the author's help, not only with a preface, like Shaw's, but also with stage directions and epilogues like his. One recalls the description in the stage directions for *Candida* of the mail the Reverend Morell has on his desk, surely out of sight of even the most eagle-eyed viewer, or the sequel Shaw provides to *Pygmalion*, lest anyone think Eliza Doolittle could have married Professor Higgins. Shaw answers Ibsen's utterance, "What I have said, I have said," with "Precisely; but the point is that what he hasn't said, he hasn't said." Shaw is troubled that a producer or actor or director or spectator or reader should be allowed to understand a text in a way the author never intended. To obviate this chance, to make sure that everyone understands just exactly what Shaw was intending and nothing else, he prepared his prefaces, his extended "reading directions."

But Shaw's heckling of the text can become as much a distortion or refocusing of it as any production. The cranky, crotchety, dyspeptic preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma* is rather at variance with the text of the play itself, which, except for the perversity of the ending and the extended death scene of Dubedat, is on the whole broadly good-natured. If we relied on Shaw's preface too heavily in responding to this play, I think we would be misled; we would miss its wonderfully human dimension, or even the essential comedy of the death scene with its series of pompous funeral orations. We may miss, particularly, the lurking diabolical quality of Sir Colenso. If we accept Shaw's insistence in his sequel to *Pygmalion* that Liza married Freddie and could never have married Higgins, we are forcing ourselves not to respond to at least one of the implications of the text, that not only could

Liza change under skilled manipulation, but that the cold manipulator himself might also change in the process of molding his human clay, that Higgins, like Pygmalion before him, might react to Galatea with the passion of a man as well as the dispassion of the artist.

That the creator may become a victim of his creation, and the more so the more perfectly he has done his work, may be illustrated by *Candida*. I think my point about studying a dramatic text closely to get the full sense of the work, with the least possible intervention of the writer himself or of the factual context of the play or of a performance, may be illustrated most piquantly by the problem of *Candida*, not least because the situation has been so thoroughly complicated by critics and actresses and by Shaw himself. Shaw's conception of *Candida* creates a problem of response in any production: we are very likely to be so captivated by her, as we are required to be, that we miss the less savory aspects of her character and personality. This is of the nature of infatuation, obviously, and the only way to disenchant ourselves is to study the unembodied text, to look at *Candida* through the words establishing her rather than through the actress and the performance.

Having created *Candida* in the fullness both of his genius and his admiration of her (perhaps even with a remote intention of humanizing and rounding out, and thus "justifying," Strindberg's Laura, or at least the "masculine" type of "New Woman" as opposed to the type represented by the doll, Nora Helmer), Shaw found *Candida* taking on an existence independent of any intention of his. Arthur Nethercot writes: "I am confident that if the actresses had acted the part as Shaw wrote it and that if the audiences had known Shaw's real opinion of *Candida* there would have been hisses and boos." But Shaw's "real opinion" of *Candida* at first was not clear-cut; his sense of her was perhaps as ambivalent as his feelings about Ellen Terry herself, whom he had in mind when creating the role. Perhaps the worst Shaw intended to indicate about *Candida* was that she uses her charm to manipulate the world about her, principally men but women as well. This is an ambiguous condemnation, especially when we compare *Candida*'s very positive sense of reality, which includes a shrewd estimate of

her own capacities, with Laura's pathological simple-mindedness, which turns to slow murder, or with Nora's pathetic self-indulgence, which turns to melodramatic flight.

Shaw did express strong feelings about *Candida*, and as a result principally, it seems to me, of the responses to her presentation on the stage. When we read the play and meet *Candida* through the text alone, without being either taken in or repelled by an actress, or otherwise worked on by a production, we see *Candida* in a rather fuller dimension: we see her in the way Shaw wrote her in the beginning. Surely we should look at the text of *Candida* with a more searching eye after a performance or after a piece of suggestive comment about it, but it is in the text that we will find a valid meaning, even if this meaning contradicts Shaw himself.

If a play belongs in any sense to the domain of literature, of writing, it is elementary that it does so because of its words on the page. The history of dramatic production is replete with examples of plays that went through hundreds of performances and are now largely forgotten except for their antiquarian interest. The history of dramatic performance is not at all identical with that of dramatic literature. *Abie's Irish Rose* and *Tobacco Road* are instances within our own memory. Conversely, of course, we have many fine plays that have been less than compelling in production. A close reading of the text seems to me indispensable in judging a contemporary playwright especially. The magic of a Broadway or Hollywood production can be so compelling that we are hoodwinked while in the audience, and it takes a cold, sober, un hypnotized, lonely view of a text to distinguish the achievement of production from the achievement of writing. (I am not speaking of the peculiar problems of the daily or weekly critic, who sometimes *cannot* allow himself to be altogether caught up by the magic. Since I bring up the professional critic, let me say that the subtlest and most responsible working commentators have always been the men who knew the texts well, Beerbohm, Shaw, Agate, Krutch, Young, Bentley, Kerr, Tynan.) Surely O'Neill, Williams, and Miller come off differently when read as literature.

So far I have emphasized the need of reading drama to under-

stand, appreciate, evaluate fully and meaningfully. This is perhaps an academic reason for reading drama. We don't always read simply to understand, appreciate, and evaluate; we read for pleasure. We read for an edification not too different in its effect from that we expect when exposing ourselves to a performance of a drama. What does reading drama offer in and of itself, without regard to a performance?

If a poor play can appear to be better than it is, the converse is also true: a play when read cannot ever be spoiled in the same way as it can when performed poorly. This is so obvious that I shall not dwell on this point, although it should not be minimized (if we had to depend only on productions of *King Lear*, I venture we might long ago have discarded the play), but it is connected with what reading drama can do. A performance must by its very nature be a specific critical comment: it limits interpretation of character and event and relationship to the particular notions of actor and director; it disarms thoughtful, ruminative response to particular moments since it must move on relentlessly; while it may open new horizons in the text for us, it must also limit them since it must always choose: Hamlet can never be in a single performance all the many things he is to us, simultaneously and legitimately, in the text.

In a sense a play, before it is a work of art, is a document. It is a record in dialogue of the confrontation between certain types of persons in certain situations. No doubt what fascinates us in reading the transcript of a trial or of a Congressional hearing or of any exchange that takes place in the formal, social, public working out of our daily affairs is the same thing that holds our attention in reading a play: we are present when people talk out their relationships, reveal their characters in their words alone. It is obviously this documentary aspect of drama which is of the essence of that objectivity of which Joyce spoke. The challenge to the artist, his peculiar problem in shaping this material, is to make of what appears to be mere document—a record of actuality with all of its whimsy, accident, inevitability, and hardness—a shaped work of art. A play must simultaneously and unmistakably appear to be both the piece of marble found in the quarry and also the work of art the sculptor fashioned.

And where else but in the unadorned document, that is, in the text of the play which we read and examine by ourselves, can we find the purity of the art-document? The playwright works with the poetry inherent in sheer statement, in sheer colloquy, and even when he works in verse, it is not so much in the language that we find the poetry (although, of course, we may extract the poetry from the dramatic moment), it is still in the declaration in its environment. However affecting as poetry Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide may be, we are far more responsive to the import of the speech in the dramatic context, as a revelation of Hamlet's feeling at a particular time in the progress of events. We respond, I would say, completely only to the documentary revelation of the speech.

If drama, then, is indeed a greater literary form than lyric or epic, it can only be so in terms of the text, for whatever is added to a text through a performance is just what is present in lyric and epic: the personal and subjective, the individual and momentary. And the reading of a play should not precede observing a performance, it should follow it; seeing drama should be an aid to reading it. Reading drama is the final and complete way for apprehending the art.

I return to Pirandello to elaborate my point precisely because he would seem to contradict it. Pirandello wrote so immediately for the stage that he sometimes seems flat and confusing in text. I have never seen *Henry IV* played, but I cannot imagine that a performance would not be more exciting, less confused, more meaningful than any reading alone could be. Pirandello's body of work is the first since *commedia del arte* (excepting, perhaps, Molnar's) which not only does not pretend that the stage is a miniature replica of reality, that it is a window on some arrangement of human activity into which we are peeping, but makes full, imaginative use of the actuality behind the convention: characters in a play are played by persons who do have their own reality; audiences are made up also of persons, some of whom are sometimes themselves actors, and who do respond to the drama behind the footlights in terms of their own experiences; the whole action spills over the footlights into the audience and the lobby. *Henry IV*, like so many of Pirandello's plays, is an essay on the tension between appearance and reality, on the destructive effect



one can have on the other. In short, his plays are theatrical in their roots and in their texture; they are never simple adaptations of fiction or history; they could never properly be rendered as fiction, except perhaps by a Kafka (who, incidentally, was most sensitive to the theater and the theatrical). Yet, having said all this, I assert that Pirandello must always and ultimately be read if we want to get the full theatrical effect of his efforts, let alone the meaning.

Consider *Each in His Own Way*, a title which hints wonderfully at one of the intriguing implications of the theater. The action on the stage takes place, as it were, against receding backdrops of reality: the play we are watching is also the play that another audience, up there on the stage, is also watching; a play audience appears in a lobby on the stage to discuss the play during intermission; in the play audience are the principals, an actress and her lover, about whom the play they are watching—which we are also watching—is written. (If this sounds like the scene you see in a barber shop with mirrors in front and in back of you, your image marching to infinity, or like the picture of the boy on the box of oats holding a box of oats with a boy on it holding a box of oats with a boy on it holding a box of oats, also ad infinitum, then I have succeeded in describing the action of this play correctly. This is a “fool the mind” art, analogous to “fool the eye” painting.)

Now how would this play? Surely very well, especially if directed and played with a sense of the grotesque. But the effect can easily be lost since the play within the play (like all such plays, I suppose, back to Hamlet's production to catch the conscience of the king) is really dull, all tedious and urgent gossip, the point of which can only be made in terms of its effect on the actress and her lover up there on the stage. A recent production of *Each in His Own Way* had the scenes that were supposed to take place in the lobby on the stage take place in the real lobby during the real intermission. Also the actress whose affairs were being depicted sat in the real audience. One result was that people were heard to remark that while the play on the stage was rather dull and aimless, the dialogue in the lobby and from the audience was really very exciting and worth coming for. Another result was that a

gentleman demanded his money back when at the end of the play, as part of it, an actor representing the theater manager announced that the play would not continue since the actress on the stage-stage had left the theater after being assaulted by the actress in the stage-audience. Pirandello, no doubt, would have delighted in this confusion.

But my point: in the theater we would be dragged, willy nilly, into the action; we would respond to Pirandello and the play with our entire person. This is all to the good, but it is as different an experience as acting in a play and seeing it; and, of course, by extension, it is as different as seeing a production must be from reading the text. It is the difference between telling or hearing a joke or a nightmare and living through either. Note that I am not evaluating one experience with respect to the other; I am merely trying to separate their unique character. So that to conclude my point about Pirandello: even with an artist whose work is so totally theatrical, the text remains to us as an independent and rich experience. And I am sure that there is even a Pirandellesque point in all this: reading a play about a play about life is another way of exploring the borders and the overlaps between art and life, truth and imagination, reality and appearance.

In short, reading a play is a very special and self-justified experience, not a *substitute* for seeing one but equal at least in its rewards with those from seeing a play or reading a poem or a novel. Perhaps the rewards are even greater, if we are persuaded by the hierarchy laid down by Stephen Dedalus.

## authors

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JEANNETTE GOULD MAINO ("Tahoe, from Echo Summit," poem, p. 367), of Modesto, California, has had

poems in the *Nation* and *Prairie Schooner*.

MORRIS FREEDMAN ("Reading drama," p. 368), a former associate editor of *Commentary*, is now at the University of New Mexico.

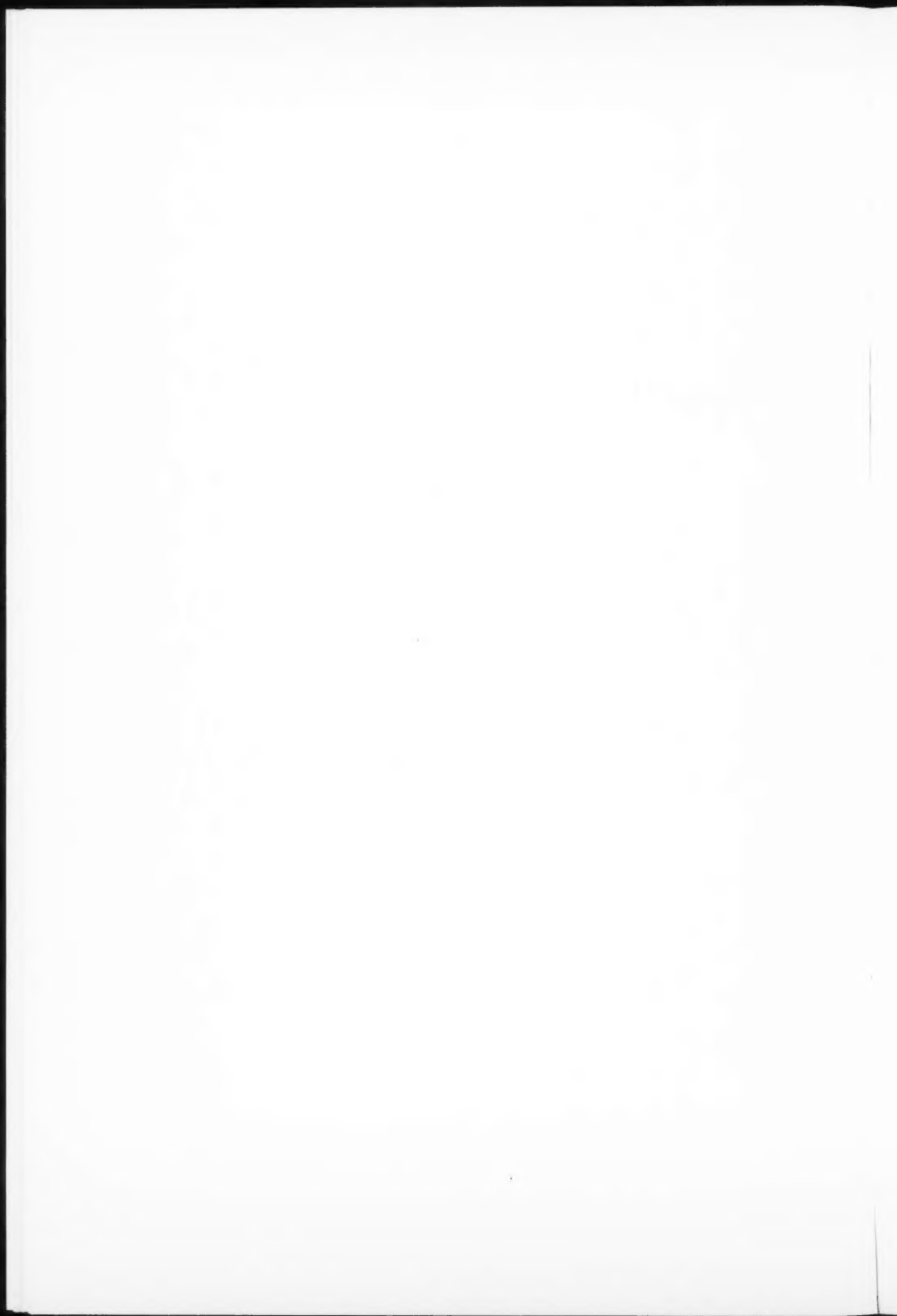


# **The Colorado Quarterly**

Published by  
THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

## **VOLUME EIGHT**

**Summer, 1959, through Spring, 1960**



# The Colorado Quarterly

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#### CORRECTION

In the Winter, 1960, number of *The Colorado Quarterly*, a misprint appeared in Ernest Kroll's *American Panels*. The correct version reads as follows:

#### SUBDIVISION

Driving the thrush before it, arrives  
The bulldozer, leveling lots.  
Like war in the woods, the shots  
Of the carpenters, hammering for their lives.

